

The Great Whore of Babylon in the Vision of Apocalypse 17.

A gender-informed approach bridging the gap between socio-historical and feminist-critical interpretations.

A Dissertation

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Table of Contents

Introduction	7
Part I: Laying the Theoretical Foundations	18
1. Delineating the Feminist Horizon	18
1.1 Main criticism to the historical-critical method from a feminist orientation	19
Provisional Conclusions (1)	31
1.2 Approaches from Socio-critical Perspective	34
Provisional Conclusions (2)	44
1.3 Approaches belonging to Literary Criticism	47
Provisional Conclusions (3)	63
1.4 Feminist Contribution to understanding of the above mentioned Perspectives	66
1.5. Delineating feminist perspectives with regard to 'apocalypse' and Apocalypse	73
General Assessment	77
2. History of Research	88
2.1 Coordinates of the main analyses of feminine imagery in the Apocalypse of John	89
2.1.1 Gendered images overall in the Apocalypse	89
2.1.2 Some relevant examples of gender-informed analysis of Apocalypse 17	101
Political focuses on the Great Whore	105
Literary Readings of the Great Whore	110
Sociological Readings of the Great Whore	118
Mythological Focus	121
Rhetographical Focus	123
The Great Whore as constitutive to Slander Discourse	125
Assessment	128
Part II: The Vision of the Great Whore in Apocalypse 17:1-6	133
Introduction	133
i. Identifying the Problem	137
ii. The Construction of the Gendered Metaphor	139
Textual Compositional Elements	140
Implied Elements	142
1. Introduction to Vision: vv. 1-2	146

1.1 Introducing the Protagonists	146
One of the seven angels having the seven bowls	148
Spoke to me	149
The judgment of the Great Whore	152
Seated upon many waters	158
1.2 Provisional Assessment (1)	164
1.3 Reasons for Judgment	166
The kings of the earth fornicated with her	168
The inhabitants of the earth have become inebriated	170
The wine of her fornication	171
1.4 Provisional Assessment (2)	173
1.5 Feminist Substance of Interest	174
2. General Overview of the Vision (17:3-6)	180
2.1. Preliminary Methodical Considerations and Structural Overview	180
3. Posture	187
3.1. Setting	187
And he carried me away	187
In the spirit	189
To a desert	191
Further associations and contrasts	195
Summary	198
3.2 Description of the Whore and the Beast. Introduction	200
And I saw	201
A woman	203
Excursus on the apocalyptic use of 'woman' and its associations	204
Seated	209
Upon a scarlet beast	212
Summary	216
Full of blasphemous names	219
Having seven heads and ten horns	221
Summary	223
3.3. Provisional Assessment (3)	226
4. Dress and Ornaments	228
4.1 Preliminary Considerations	228
And the woman has been clothed	229
Excursus on various attires in the Apocalypse. Implications	230
Summary	234
With purple and scarlet	235
Summary	240
And has been adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls	240
Summary	245
In her hand, she had a golden cup	247
Full with abominations and with the impurities of her prostitution	250

Summary	254
4.2 Provisional Assessment (4)	256
5. Titles of Harlotry	259
5.1 Preliminary Considerations.....	259
Upon her forehead, a name	260
Summary	264
Has been written.....	265
Summary	267
Mystery	267
Summary	270
Babylon the Great.....	270
Excursus on female images as cities.....	276
Mother of Whores	280
Summary	290
Mother. Further Interpretational Options	292
Summary	295
(Mother) of the Earth's abominations	296
5.2 Provisional Assessment (5)	298
6. Seer's reaction to the vision.....	301
6.1 Preliminary Considerations.....	301
And I saw the woman drunk	305
Summary	314
With the blood	315
Implications of the metaphor.....	318
Other implications.....	324
Summary	326
[blood of] the saints and the blood of the witnesses to Jesus.....	327
Saints.....	329
Witnesses of Jesus	332
Summary	335
And I was greatly amazed	337
Summary	345
Upon seeing her/this	346
Summary	348
6.2 Provisional Assessment (6)	349
Conclusions	353
Bibliography	362

Abstract

The vision of Apocalypse 17 describes in a judgmental manner the Great Whore. Whereas nothing in her attire or adornment indicates the justification of such a title, sexual appellatives permeate her description thus confining her interpretation within certain boundaries.

This research subjects the vision of the Great Whore to a feminist critique by employing various interpretative strategies, especially readers' response in order to overcome the gap existing between socio-historical (traditional) interpretations of the Great Whore and feminist-critical (postmodern) ones.

Preoccupied with analyzing the effects the text has on readers, the dissertation is ultimately a reaction to readings that conceive the Great Whore figuratively, as referring to a city. For this reason, I embrace the sexuality permeating the description of the Great Whore.

The thematic approach currently described implies engaging with the vision of the Apocalypse afresh, by articulating the stand against the androcentric ideology in the text and inadequate treatment of feminine imagery.

In this attempt, I fully acknowledge the power of the metaphorical expressions contained in the image of the Great Whore, as well as value the sources identified traditionally in the construction of this counter-creation of God.

Ultimately, I offer a corrective approach in the textual treatment of the Great Whore, which is frequently read and interpreted in the light of Apocalypse 18.

Intertextuality and intersubjectivity help maintain a balance while interpreting by constantly unmasking the ideological effects of Biblical texts, contained in particular generic expressions

Introduction

In terms of exegetical difficulties, Apocalypse 17 is a genuine minefield.

From a gender-informed perspective, the vision of the Great Whore as depicted in Apocalypse 17:1-6 is a challenging text. It employs derogatory signifiers and accusations addressed to a gendered textual construction, such as the Great Whore.

The current academic endeavour aims to respond to the dissatisfaction with the treatment of this image complex, as with the following formulation: “[...] male characters or male-identified characters in the Apocalypse are also stereotyped, vilified, criticized or idealized. But they are rarely ‘typed’ with the explicit sexual signifiers used of female characters”.¹

As a disclaimer, I acknowledge the fact that the Bible represents for me, the author of this study a sacred text, capable of inspiring and guiding communities nowadays as previously, having full authority.

Nevertheless, I acknowledge also the fact that patriarchal thinking was the context in which the Bible emerged and developed traditionally. My standpoint, informed by feminist critical issues, revolves on unmasking patriarchal ideology, as interpretation is not innocent.

In general, the feminist critique approaches Biblical texts with suspicion, in order to unravel their androcentric character. Also this type of exegetical endeavour relies on full acknowledgement of the texts’ historical conditionedness, biases,² prejudices, value-systems. At the same time, the interpreter’s values are overtly subjected to the same scrutiny, evidencing his/her standpoint, in terms of biases and prejudices.

The analytical lenses provided by a gender-informed perspective with regard to the analysis of Biblical texts largely encompass questions such as: *what and how does a text refer to women?; in what type of relationship with other characters is the feminine character portrayed?; does this portrayal contain derogatory concepts that fail to address women as fully human, especially when placed in the post-modern context?; how are gendered readers to interpret and relate to such image?*

The more I started reading on various interpretations of the Great Whore as depicted in the vision of Apocalypse 17, the more baffled I became at the academic attempts featured within the spectre of the historical-critical method. Often, it implied a total rejection of the

¹ Pamela Thimmes, Women Reading Women in the Apocalypse: Reading Scenario 1, the Letter to Thyatira (Rev. 2. 18-29), in: *Currents in Biblical Research*, 2/2003, 128-144, 129.

² I understand ‘bias’, ‘biasness’ as the deliberate stance of an author, or interpreted to present a specific angle of vision. In view of this ‘feminist bias’ is in this case, the theoretical commitment to partake in the empowerment of women.

corporeal dimension of the character in discussion, although the text made specific reference to the Great Whore as 'woman', 'whore' and described her in terms belonging to the feminine dimension.

At the other end of the interpretative spectrum, with postmodern perspectives, Apocalypse began to be read as fantasy literature, and the 'whore' more like whore. This seemed to be an orientation I was also not able to completely fall for.

Additionally, various stances adopted by the feminist exegetes cover rejection of the Biblical message contained in Apocalypse 17, or its unnatural positive evaluation.

In other words, the scholarship usually registers nowadays a gap based on the socio-historical, as well as literary aspects entrenched in the understanding of the ancient readers (Elizabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza, Barbara Rossing etc.) on the one hand, and on the other the understanding of post-modern readers, informed by postmodern categories, among which gender, without considering the ancient ones (Tina Pippin).

To exemplify, with a challenging text at hand, such as the Whore in Apocalypse 17, elaborating a positive evaluation of the gendered character can be hindered. The way to salvage the text is to look into its political potential, by placing the character in the larger context of various expressions of liberation theologies, and by deeming gender as *secondary* in importance.³

With the latter's formulation, gender is brought into the focus at the expense of the text, for a theological formulation of the Great Whore is adamantly rejected and so, it reinstates the oppressive patterns concerning women.

The readings above motivated my search for an *in-between* evaluation. This dissertation does not describe an 'either-or' situation. As a result, exposing the corporeal dimension evident with the depiction of the Great Whore does not trigger a rejection of the text, nor does it imply an entirely subjective understanding.

Instead, it shows that a compromise at the level of interpretative options can be achieved. It envisions collaboration between the two academic orientations presented above.

For this reason, the current perspective takes a *moderate* standpoint in the feminist debate with regard to the assessment of the gendered character in question.

It contains valuable contributions from both socio-historical part, as well as the feminist-critical one. Subsequently, the insufficiency of textual contrastive schemes, major OT

³ Elisabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza, *Revelation. Vision of A Just World* (Proclamation Commentaries), Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991.

traditions carrying a political undertone will be provided with the metaphorical power to render an image effective, by employing gender.

The scope of my dissertation is the realization that 'liberation' from oppressive textual formulations can be achieved also by exposing the patriarchal biases and androcentric constructions. Even if the text is surfacing a violent misogynist view, rejecting it is not an option.

For the reasons above, I formulate the current dissertation as a means of bridging the gap between the different understandings in reclaiming the Biblical text from a theological perspective. Finding the balance between various formulations of feminist interpretations oscillating between accepting and rejecting the text is crucial.

The approach I am currently pursuing is not primarily historical, but theoretical. The distinction is formulated more clearly, if we consider the former to search for a correspondence between real historical events and persons and the Biblical narratives, whereas with the latter approach "events and people are understood and analyzed through a lens of theory and conjecture"⁴, in this particular case, gender.

A reading of the Apocalypse from postmodern gender-informed optics reveals that in the history of the text's reception, the difference between 'sex' and 'gender' has often been blurred, especially when analyzing the concept 'genre' historically.

Attention is given to the literary unity between *sex* –marking biological distinctions between 'man' and 'woman' and *gender* –encapsulating the types of social and cultural performances relative to particular sex-distinctions in Ancient Greek as well as lack of issues stemming from this dissociation. That is why, for Ancient readers, certain concepts of substance for the postmodern gender-informed perspective are most certainly gender-inclusive.

At the same time, a constructivist approach of gender, respectively, gendered images in the Apocalypse⁵ gains contours: I am not basing the thesis on an essentialist perspective, associated with the first and second wave feminism. This view is fundamentally rooted in women's nature, fixed biological attributes, having their liberation as a necessary aim.

⁴ Judy Diehl, 'Babylon': Then, Now and 'Not Yet': Anti-Roman Rhetoric in the Book of Revelation, in: *Currents in Biblical Research*, 11(2)/2013, 168-195, 172.

⁵ Jorunn Økland, Sex, Gender and Ancient Greek: A Case Study in Theoretical Misfit, in: *Studia Theologica-Nordic Journal of Theology*, 5(2)/2003, 124-147, 131.

Instead, a constructivist approach is pursued, which conceives sex, gender, sexuality to be the result of socio-cultural and historical circumstances, ever changing.⁶

It is for this reason that the historical-critical method will be useful, for it anchors the text in the actual contemporary context of John's times.

Even if I operate within the framework of gender-informed studies, I consider the necessity of interpretation with the ancient socio-historical background in mind.

It adds a deeper dimension to understanding by critically assessing cultural data and norms, thus provide the possibility of a more 'sober' interpretation.

With the Apocalypse nowadays, being culturally repected by various groups of people, of various cultural backgrounds and formation –gender is considered constitutive in the construction of identity throughout the Apocalypse.⁷

Postmodern readers and interpretations should also acknowledge the fact that at the time when the Apocalypse was written a one-sex model operated, so gender issues were not a concern.

These emerged with the advent of modernism, with the broadening of the spectrum of the various theoretical models having interdisciplinary nature, which were applied to exegesis, starting with the second half of the 20th century. The feminist interest shaped all subsequent feminist critical interpretations of the Apocalypse, however to various degrees. The theoretical model of feminist exegesis acknowledges the fact that gender is not a neutral category, but reveals political, cultural and social attitudes that are not unproblematic.

This effort can be also conceived as a multilayered interdisciplinary approach, where intertextuality ranks high. The concept of intertextuality is important because it entails much more than a literary understanding. The embeddedness of the text of the Apocalypse in other dimensions is valued as well, comprising thus historical, social and rhetorical formulations. Intertexts enrich our understanding further on certain standardized ancient literary and theological motifs, called *topoi*, rooted in the social realities of the 1st century.

As a contextual approach, the feminist orientation is aiming to respond to the following questions: *how is gender biasness represented in this text? How is the meaning of the text altered if read from a feminist perspective, is there a hope for feminist interpretation of this text?*

⁶ Økland, Sex, Gender, 129.

⁷ This is one of the important theses in the article by Hanna Stenström, Is Salvation Only for True Men?, On Gendered Imagery in the Book of Revelation, in: Michael Labahn, Outi Lehtipuu (eds.), *Imagery in the Book of Revelation*, Leuven/Paris/Walpole, MA: Peeters, 2011, 183-198, 193.

The current academic enterprise situates itself, in spite of the derogatory resonances of the object of analysis, respectively, the Great Whore as depicted in the vision of Apocalypse 17 aiming to provide a *corrective hermeneutic stance* that could possibly correspond, at least partially to the realities of contemporaneity.

The critical feminist hermeneutics employed keeps theology open for dialogues, asking questions not only of the Biblical text but also of the Christian community and the world.⁸

It is for this reason that the text will be closely considered. Since the text is dependent on the context, its historical and social realities will also be included.

My interpretation acknowledges the intersubjective frame with respect to the history of the reception of the text.

While considering the often-overlooked corporeal aspect, I am attempting not at a corporeal reading of the Whore, but at a rhetorical reading.⁹ Such reading may have the capacity of shaping conflicting changes in the readers' behaviour in terms of ethical choices presented.

Rhetorics formulates its primary concern with the nature and persuasive quality of any text. For this reason, the text of the Apocalypse needs to be analyzed as a whole. Additionally, the constitutive elements of the whole are valued in terms of identifying the strategies used to persuade the readers.

To study a text rhetorically means therefore to analyze the persuasive¹⁰ markers capable of changing the behaviours and attitudes of readers, emphasizing the function as well as the effects of the text on the readers.

The rhetorical use of the image of the Whore in the Apocalypse deals with John's use of it. Given the varieties concerning the interpretations attributed to the Great Whore, with references to various Biblical and extrabiblical traditions, the following question could be formulated: *how exactly and to what extent does the Whore operate in the plot of the Apocalypse as a whole?*

⁸ William David Kirkpatrick, From Biblical Text to Theological Formulation, in: Bruce Corley, Steve Lemke, Grant Lovejoy (eds.), *Biblical Hermeneutics. A Comprehensive Introduction to Interpreting Scripture* (2nd ed.), Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2002, 356-373, 358.

⁹ Cf. the concept of 'visionary rhetoric' as per Elizabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza, Visionary Rhetoric and Social Political Situation (chapter seven), in: eadem, *The Book of Revelation. Justice and Judgement*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998, 187.

¹⁰ Greg Carey refers to apocalyptic texts as "acts of persuasion". Cf. Greg Carey, Introduction: Apocalyptic Discourse, Apocalyptic Rhetoric, in: G. Carey, L. Gregory Bloomquist (eds.), *Vision and Persuasion: Rhetorical Dimensions of Apocalyptic Discourse*, St. Louis: Chalice, 1999, 1-17, 15.

The Great Whore purports several titles: *whore*, *woman*, *mother*, but also *city*. She is clothed, bejeweled like a woman.

Almost everything in her characterization belongs to the conceptual domain of woman.

Subsequently, I understand the rhetorical force behind such titles, their role in activating a response from readers, while holding on to the cultural and historical explanations of the concept 'woman'.

Formulations such as the above encapsulate ethical values, which are very important for the Apocalypse. By 'ethical', I mean the fact that John establishes and develops throughout a set of normative truths, by means of argumentation procedures, aiming at formulations of what is acceptable and what is not acceptable.

In view of the possible misogynist stance as well as the portrayals of violence, the ethical stances in the Apocalypse are quite problematic in their universal use, therefore should be confined to the discourse of the Apocalypse.

In linking the two aspects, namely the rhetorical one with the ethical one, I consider the gendered image of the Great Whore in the Apocalypse a rhetorical construction, which needs to be analyzed with the context of its appearance, as well as the postmodern context of its reception.

My contention is that genre is used 'to think with' in the effectiveness of the imagery. That means the fact that the description of the Great Whore appeals to the senses, imaginations of readers. By doing so, it actually conveys another message, and namely that people from the audience associating with the sensuous Great Whore may turn out to have her fate.

Incorporating the audience, or the readers in the interpretative scheme, the following questions can be formulated: *is there any message we as modern readers (should) get beyond the triumph of God in the Apocalypse? And if the triumph of God is all that matters, how is 'gender' to be conceived of? Is 'gender' closely and carefully worth delineating, or is it simply means to an end?*

Regarding modern readers, *does it make a difference if we read as women, and although get the main picture, are we not supposed to emotionally involve in the reading process? Because, if we involve, how is it possible that we can dissociate our feelings for what is expressed there?*

Readers' values, as well as identity are accomplished by dichotomizing actions into laudable and despicable. The ones pursuing laudable actions are given privileged positions in the heavenly court; they have correct worshiping attitudes, and will share in the

exultation over the punishment of the wicked, whereas the evildoers will partake in extensive accounts of the just judgments of God. This is called epideictic rhetoric.¹¹ In what methodological considerations are concerned, an outline of descriptive research conjoined with evaluative research will be offered.

The argumentation of this thesis revolves around two main parts: one, in which the main theoretical concepts employed throughout the dissertation, will be discussed, and the other part, where an exemplification of the theoretical frame delineated previously is showcased.

The study's theoretical foundations rest on the assumption that the Apocalypse needs to be read within feminist orientation.

As such, the gender-informed parameters are formulated in chapter 1.

Within this framework, literary considerations, as well as social that influenced and shaped the feminist-critical claims were named, and critically evaluated.

In chapter 2, an overview of the main orientations in gender-related interest with the character of the Great Whore precisely is very important in order to show the variety and richness of different orientations that coexist within the tradition.

Since there are various feminist responses coexisting even with reference to a single topic, this study combines various approaches of Biblical exegesis. Socio-historical approaches co-exist with literary critical and feminist-critical approaches. The dynamics I employ starts with the Biblical text and extends towards to the text's contexts, which can be literary, historical, cultural, social, as well evaluating the text as a powerful rhetorical tool. It also includes pragmatic perspectives such as rhetorical criticism, or reader's response that interprets the text by means of concepts and categories pertaining to contemporaneity. I value every reading of the apocalyptic text, for each contribute individually to deepening the Biblical message, to understanding more accurately what was communicated to us so that we may reach salvation.

Questions regarding the function of gendered characters, depicted negatively resurfaced in answering the questions of why were these references chosen, and how they functioned, even more having what type of repercussions on various contemporary readers.

The apocalypse as a literary genre, having characteristics and being comparable to other literary ancient phenomena is therefore important for its understanding or interpretation.

¹¹ Loren L. Johns, *The Lamb Christology of the Apocalypse of John, An Investigation Into Its Origins and Rhetorical force*, (Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 2. Reihe, 167), Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003, 157.

The term ἀποκάλυψις refers to the self-designation in the NT Apocalypse of John (1:1). It also denotes a number of related scriptures, though the term is usually not employed as an original self-designation in these scriptures themselves.¹²

Subsequently, stemming from the Greek verb ἀποκαλύπτειν, i.e. to uncover, to reveal¹³, the title was easily extended to works in which the same theme is at least as preeminent, respectively works dealing with the unveiling of God's mysteries and messages.

Apocalypse 1:1 reveals the means by which the divine revelation, respectively ἀποκάλυψις Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ¹⁴ unfolds, namely primarily through visions, visual images, which the author of the Apocalypse transcribes into words at the heavenly command (cf. 1:11, 1:19).

However, visions and auditions¹⁵ are equally revealing as they are cryptically veiling the meaning. They refer to realities that are difficult to grasp and readers are required to participate as audience, however in a manner different from John's, who sometimes describes what he sees by means of comparative particles such as ὥς (71 times), as well as adjectives such as ὅμοιον (24 times).¹⁶

As a result, language of the Apocalypse is performative creating new meaning(s), for it permanently evokes associations, thus open to new interpretations.

It is this particular imagery that deeply moves the reader as the act of reading unfolds, being labelled among others as bizarre¹⁷, vivid¹⁸, surreal¹⁹, weird²⁰ and grotesque.

¹² Olsson Tord, The Apocalyptic Activity. The Case of Jāmāsp Nāmag, in: David Hellholm (ed.) *Apocalypticism in the Mediterranean World and the Near East: Proceedings of the International Colloquium on Apocalypticism, Uppsala, August 12-17, 1979* (2nd edition), Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1989, 21-49, 21.

¹³ Sidnie White Crawford, Art. Apocalypse, in: Freedman, David Noel Allen C. Myers (eds.), *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*, Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000, 72-73, 72.

¹⁴ All translations from the Greek New Testament are my own. I employed Barbara Aland, Kurt Aland and Johannes Karavidopoulos (eds.), *Nestle-Aland Novum Testamentum Graece*, (27th ed. revised), Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2006.

¹⁵ John combines involving senses such as seeing and hearing in reporting the various visions, by means of employing either forms of the verb ὁράω (47 mentionings) or other semantically related verbs, like βλέπω (x 13) etc., or by various forms of the verb ἀκούω (x 43 times).

¹⁶ Moises Mayordomo, Gewalt in der Johannesoffenbarung als theologisches Problem, in: Thomas Schmeller et al. (eds.), *Die Offenbarung Johannes. Kommunikation im Konflikt* (Quaestiones Disputatae 253), Freiburg: Herder, 2013, 107-136, 117-118.

¹⁷ John Sweet, Revelation, in: John Barclay and John Sweet (eds.), *Early Christian Thought in Jewish Context*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996, 160-174, 161.

¹⁸ Ian Paul, The Book of Revelation: Image, Symbol and Metaphor, in: Steve Moyise, *Studies in the Book of Revelation*, Edinburgh/New York: T&T Clark, 2001, 131-147, 131.

¹⁹ Giancarlo Biguzzi, A Figurative and and Narrative Language Grammar of Revelation, in: *Novum Testamentum*, 45/2003, 382-402, 399.

²⁰ Henry Barclay Swete, *Apocalypse of John* (3rd ed.), London: Macmillan, 1917, cxxxi.

Subsequently, the analysis ensued included information concerning the fact that Apocalypse was not as bizarre, as the modern reader may imagine, but it was one of many such works.

From a gender-informed perspective, the evaluation of language in the Apocalypse received a more negative reception, being interpreted as terrifying, sexist, misogynistic, objectifying, dehumanizing, condescending, disturbing and dangerous.²¹

It is in the latter category that the vision of the Great Prostitute in Apocalypse 17 is situated. This vision reports of the culpability of a character, identified as the Great Whore, being seconded by an angelic emissary that assists the Seer transported in the Spirit in understanding what unfolds before his eyes.

Because the language describing visions blends literal and figurative references, evidencing ample examples of metaphors, allegory, personification, metonymy, as well as comparisons, mostly informed by the textual changes of the situation of the narrator (ἐν πνεύματι, πνευματικῶς, καὶ εἶδον etc.), exegetes strove to establish guidelines in the various interpretations, by extending connections of the text of the Apocalypse with other semantically, or thematically related texts.²²

The exegetical analysis follows the steps of the well-established, widely acknowledged historical-critical method. However, the feminist turn of the current approach lies in the focus given to the socially and culturally constructed nature of history. Such an assumption forms a corollary, namely that language is relative, all against the discourse changes brought about by the second half of the 20th century.

Postmodern orientations focus on the inexactness of the language, on the richness and plurivalence of interpretations, on the emotional responses triggered by the text from the readers, on political and social implications of the text as well as on sensitive aspects such as gender.

By acknowledging the power behind the metaphorical use, I extend the meaning of this metaphor beyond the historical relevance. What ultimately counts is not that, but the theological significance assigned to the gendered appearance in the vision of Apocalypse 17.

²¹ For the various orientations, cf. Miyon Chung, *Feminist Interpretations of Apocalyptic Symbols in the Revelation*, in: *Torch Trinity Journal*, vol. 10 (1)/2007, 107-126, more specifically works by Tina Pippin, and Susan Garrett, which will be further dealt with in greater detail at a later point in the current dissertation.

²² Cf. Gregory Beale, *The Book of Revelation. A Commentary on the Greek Text*, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1998, 57; G.B. Caird, *The Language and Imagery of the Bible*, Pennsylvania: Westminster Press 1980, 186-197.

With every reading, therefore, a metaphor's meaning can change, as the readership changes, for the readership itself is not atemporal, but context-bound, situated in permanent intersubjectivity with the previous ('traditional') readings and the concepts modeling the postmodern readers.

With the above mentioned dimension the following questions emerge: *How real are designations? How literal are we to read the text? Alternatively, how symbolic are these? How far from reality are we willing to go in order to prove a generic irrelevance for a clearly gender character in the apocalypse?*

The second part of the dissertation aims at a practical application of the categories formulated previously. It is here that the feminist critique is emphasized better. However, in maintaining the feminist orientation, I will not deter from being occasionally critical to feminist formulations, which extend beyond the textual references and bring about too much emotional involvement on the readers' behalf.

The strategy in interpreting I will be applying consists mainly in literary analysis, paired with exegetical reflection. It will also include, when needed, supplementary information in the form of excurses. Tables will occur as a didactic aid assisting the readers in instantiating the arguments in a clearer manner, by their use of comparison and contrast.

Further, summaries will reiterate the main ideas and concepts discussed. Chapters will be accompanied individually by provisional assessments. The need for these is given by the plurality of strategies in appropriating the Great Whore. The concluding comments function to avoid on the one hand getting lost in the complexity of arguments, on the other hand, to remain consistent to the main objective of the dissertation that is presenting a gender-informed analysis on the character of the Great Whore as emerging form the vision of Apocalypse 17.

I chose to split this part into six chapters, corresponding the three moments of the vision: the introduction to the vision, the vision and the Seer's reaction to the vision.

Chapter 1 of Part II deals with the presentation of the setting, the protagonists and the reasons for the Whore's judgments. Already with Chapter 2, which provides a general overview of the core vision, follows the delineation of the Great Whore's portrait (chapters 3-5). It includes references to her posture (seated), her associate (Beast), dress and ornaments, including purple and scalet, gold, pearls and precious stones, as well as the name she wears on her forehead. Chapter 6 describes in detail the implications and meaning of the Seer's reaction to the apparition of the Great Whore described previously.

In the Conclusions, I will present briefly the results of the evaluative study conducted on the above-mentioned gendered manifestation.

I enlist my contribution within postmodern approaches to the text of the Apocalypse, precisely those, which consider readers' responses. Even if the current approach revolves on the readers' reception, which is a postmodern preoccupation, a theological appropriation of the text with academic value should not dismiss the context, the history behind the text, the anchoring in socio-political realities. However, this acknowledgement does not mean that the problematic areas are glossed upon. These are revealed, contextualized.

In this way, I rest on the assumption fact that there is no single valid interpretation to the Apocalypse. The lines uniting the 'fixed stars', or the given data in the Apocalypse are far from being limited to one single possibility, for apocalyptic language abounds with metaphorical expressions, reminding thus the reader permanently that "construction of meaning is neither an objective nor a subjective process: it is both."²³

Whereas the main advantage that a feminist exegesis purports includes mainly widening as well as deepening the research horizon, I would like to point the fact that this study offers an *alternative* interpretation to the multiple interpretations existing already.

Here lies its shortcoming. As a result, no claim for universality, no generalizations can result from it. It is a mere contextual formulation, deeply informed by generic factors.

This orientation doubled by openness towards the interpreter in the interpretation process. As such, it lists questions such as to which paradigm adheres the current dissertation, *what type of a feminist scholar is needed, as well as what are the limitations of a feminist Biblical scholar?*

By presenting one feminist interpretation of the Great Whore that values readers' perceptions anchored in the rhetorical character of the Apocalypse as a whole, I hope to be able to prove that a feminist outlook is not detrimental to the actual understanding of the vision of Apocalypse 17. On the contrary, it can be a valuable tool to assess and actualize the meaning of the text by employing postmodern categories of analysis in a manner which I consider to be respectful of both ancient and postmodern contexts.

²³ David L. Barr, The Story John Told: Reading Revelation for Its Plot, in: David L. Barr (ed.), *Reading the Book of Revelation. A Resource for Students*, London/Boston: Brill, 2004, 11-25, 14.

Part I: Laying the Theoretical Foundations

1. Delineating the Feminist Horizon

Initiated out of socio-political motivations, as an expression of societal criticism, and drawn from multiple philosophical, social and cultural traditions, feminist discourse was adopted in the theological reflection of the second half of the 20th century.

“Feminist theology is a theology conducted by women with a feminist orientation, attempting at the acknowledgement, naming, criticizing and surpassing of patriarchy in society, church and communal life. In feminist theology women are at the core of interests; their faith- and life-related experiences of oppression, silencing and marginalization, as well as experiences of liberation and successful gaining of dignity are concretized in it, from a theological perspective. Feminist theology is contextual theology, accounting for the historicity of life situations, as well the limitation of theological statements. It is not a theology of the woman, which presupposes either an abstract woman essence, or knowledge of something specifically feminine, but rather calls for the fragility of the feminine identity and tries to overturn the stiff attribution of gender roles. It is a critique and a new draft. It understands itself not as an addition to the traditional theology”.²⁴

In the same vein, Pamela Thimmes enumerates the coordinates delineating a feminist hermeneutics: feminism as a liberation movement, experience, culture, reading/interpretation (language).

(1) Feminism –is a political category understood and practiced a liberation movement, critiquing the oppressive structures of society, (2) Experience –is not simply a construct; it also constructs, (3) Culture (social location) –mediates our experience, and thus our worldview or paradigms, (4) Reading/Interpretation (Language) –language is more than simply a non-material tool, it is an expression of a particular understanding of reality. It is in language that social locators (gender, race, class, etc.) are first noticed and first submerged.²⁵

²⁴ Catharina J. M. Halkes/ Hedwig Meyer-Wilmes, Art. Feministische Theologie, in: Elizabeth Gössmann, Elizabeth Moltmann-Wendel et.al (eds.), *Wörterbuch der Feministischen Theologie*, Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1991, 102-111, 102, as cited in Angela Volkmann, *Eva wo bist du? Die Geschlechterperspektive im Religionsunterricht am Beispiel einer Religionsbuchanalyse zu biblischen Themen*, Würzburg: Verlag Königshausen & Neumann GmbH, 2004, 66, translation mine.

²⁵ Pamela Thimmes, What Makes a Feminist Reading Feminist? Another Perspective, in: Harold C. Washington, Susan Lochrie Graham and Pamela Thimmes (eds.) *Escaping Eden. New Feminist Perspectives on Bible*, New York: New York University Press/ Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999, 132-140, 134, her italics.

Those elements will be presented as my analysis unfolds in an attempt to describe the set of assumptions that regulate the current gender-informed enterprise.

The current section will also entail a development of the critique to the historical-critical method, which is to a certain extent the legitimating source for a feminist approach. The critique will be therefore employed only selectively and only regarding the categories of feminist approach, which pertain to the scope of the current presentation.

The experience of women occurred as a medium in which the gender-related discourse grows. Since “theology involves interpreting the tradition in the light of experience, and vice versa, [...] the essential contribution of feminist theology to the life of the Christian community is to articulate women's experience and ensure that it receives due weight in understanding and communicating the Christian gospel.”²⁶

As a result, the gender-informed perspective advances in the field of Biblical studies the claim to offer “an alternative assessment of the Biblical evidence as seen through the eyes and experience of women readers and theologians.”²⁷

Our existence and experience is multiple *palliers* of knowledge, therefore, gender-related Biblical criticism stands in an interdisciplinary relation to feminist history, literary criticism, anthropology, as well as other feminist theories²⁸ emphasizing the fact that commitment to feminism is variously understood and expressed.

1.1 Main criticism to the historical-critical method from a feminist orientation

A gender-critical approach brought about a contribution to a long row of changes meant at a sophistication of the categories, which pertained to the historical-critical method enjoying the widest acceptance in the field of Biblical studies.

Although this approach did not cause the shift in paradigm as it will be shown in the following, the gender-informed approach concurs to the manner in which our perception about reality changes.

²⁶ Robert Morgan, *Feminist Theological Interpretation of the New Testament*, in: Janet Martin Soskice (ed.), *After Eve Women, Theology and the Christian Tradition* (Women and Religion Series), London: Collins Publishing Group, 1990, 10-38, 10-11.

²⁷ D. F. Sawyer, *Art. Feminist interpretation*, in: R. H. Coggins, J.L. Houlden (eds.), *A Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation*, London: SCM, 1990, 231-234, 234 .

²⁸ Janice Capel Anderson, *Mapping Feminist Biblical Criticism. The American Scene, 1983-1990*, in: Eldon Jay Epp (ed.), *Critical Review of Books in Religion*, Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1991, 21-44, 22.

It also displays the results in a number of new readings in the field of Biblical studies, each of them laying an emphasis on different aspects, however all related to core feminist issues.

With Biblical criticism generally, there was a tension between historical criticism and feminist discourse.

Feminism was reprimanded the lack of scholarly validity, seriousness, objectivity. Its results were deemed unscientific, ideological, reductionist, as feminists debate with emotions and basically do nothing, but parrot other feminists in their writings.²⁹

Oddly enough, some of the accusations above have been turned by the feminists against the apologists of the historical-criticism. Subsequently, the method was considered unfeeling, cerebral, irreligious, too philological in its interests, “often restricted to the experts and not accessible to a general readership.”³⁰ The method was deemed irrelevant to pastoral praxis. Its lack of objectivity by not addressing women’s questions was highly criticized as well as the ideological stance displaying a propagation of a type of interpretation subservient to masculine interests.³¹

Granted, although feminist exegesis operates largely within the structures pertaining to the above-mentioned method, it adduces important methodological nuances to it, by embracing a multiplicity of inputs borrowed and/or adapted from other disciplines, ranging from literary to social and psychological as well as spiritual.³²

The feminist endeavour delineated the growing awareness of the axiom of the contemporary hermeneutists, namely that interpretation is fundamentally shaped by the multi-faceted world of the interpreter, including his/her presuppositions and prejudices, which cannot be acceptable with the historical-critical method.

²⁹ Monika Fander, Historical-Critical Methods, in: Elizabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza (ed.), *Searching the Scriptures, Volume 1: A Feminist Introduction*, London: SCM Press Ltd. / New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1993, 204-224, 214.

³⁰ Elizabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza, *Wisdom Ways. Introducing Feminist Biblical Interpretation*, Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2001, 135.

³¹ Fander, Historical-Critical Methods, 206.

³² Carolyn Osiek, The Feminist and the Bible: Hermeneutical Alternatives, in: *Harvard Theological Studies* 53(4), 1997, 956-968, also published under the same title in: Adela Yarbro Collins (ed.), *Feminist Perspectives in Biblical Scholarship*, (Society for Biblical Literature Centennial Publications 10), Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1985, 94-105. For this reason, the article in *Harvard Theological Studies* will be abbreviated as ‘Osiek, The Feminist and the Bible a’ and the article in *Feminist Perspectives in Biblical Scholarship* as ‘Osiek, The Feminist and the Bible b’.

As such, the nature and value of certain processes such as 'reading', 'understanding', 'interpretation', 'competence' have been broadened by subsequent formulations echoed from the many disciplines enunciated above.

Whereas the manifold incursions, either historical, sociological, theological, as well literary shape the coordinates of the feminist movement, such delimitations are exceedingly fluid, due to the interdisciplinary or pluridisciplinary character of feminist-critical studies.

In what follows, I selectively present the approaches, which pertain to the scope of this study. They are directly or indirectly the results of the criticism brought to the historical critical method.

The reason for such an endeavour is to delineate the Christian framework within which the feminist consciousness is elaborated.

As previously mentioned, the historical-critical method provides the framework, which legitimates Biblical scholarship.

The feminist approach is historically fostered by the Enlightenment, a movement, which offered the change in paradigm wherein an alternative worldview emerges, develops and brings about a totally new understanding of the human beings.

Already starting with the second half of the 19th century, some of the general categories pertaining to the historical-critical method were taken from the Enlightenment model and transferred onto contemporary concerns. Objectivity³³, validity, trans-temporality and universality receive intense scrutinisation.

In this framework, objectivity of one opposed subjectivity of the other, value-neutrality contrasted biasness and interest, the universal opposed the particular, the trans-temporal interpretation the historically relevant one and the contextual.

The particular categories of *androcentrism*, *patriarchy*, *asymmetry with respect to gender*, *relevance for the contemporary context* informed by a feminist critique will be discussed at a later point in the current study.

A new alternative on viewing *history* emerged. The new perspective on history prompted by the postmodern epistemological, sociological, literary theories claim *the particular* as norm. This fact resulted into a relativisation of the current paradigm.

Therefore a greater interest on the epistemological character of *experience* concretized in the work of Hans Georg Gadamer, who places knowledge and understanding within the

³³ Marie-Theres Wacker, Part One: Historical Hermeneutical and Methodological Foundations, in: Luise Schottroff, Silvia Schroer, Marie-Theres Wacker (eds.), *Feminist Interpretation. The Bible in Women's Perspective*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998, 3-82, 48.

boundaries of the finite situatedness, which one experiences as part of the flow of history.³⁴ *Conditionedness* is the main concept he theorizes about.

*Even when we ourselves, as historically enlightened thinkers, are fundamentally clear about the historical conditionedness of all human thinking and hence about our own conditionedness, we have not ourselves taken an unconditioned stand [...]. The consciousness of the conditionedness does not in any way negate this conditionedness.*³⁵

History is therefore understood as a contextual phenomenon, representing the circumstances informing the questions the interpreter asks and thus sets the focus of the interpretation.

History continually manifests itself in the reading communities. Though shaped by the interpretive communities of different eras, it can focus on different issues. In this way, the historically distant texts gain relevance repeatedly, as per the shift of the focus on the *interpreter*, or *reader* borrowed from the literary studies.

In line with this, Robert W. Funk states, the historical-critical method “failed to take into account the limitations and the biases of the interpreter”.³⁶ With the addition of the latter, the argument gains a deeper dimension, displaying the *two sidedness of historical conditioning*.³⁷

First, there is the acknowledgement of the historical conditionedness of Biblical texts – referring to their original context. This observation is doubled by the particularity of the 21st century interpreter –referring to his/her linguistic, epistemological limitations, biases and interest(s).

Secondly, the historical conditionedness of the Biblical texts and their subsequent interpretation enroll in a pre-existing chain of interpretations.

The interpreter is also historically conditioned. Although contemporary in terms of historical context, the interpreter stands within a given tradition of interpretations as part of the reception of any text.

³⁴ Anthony C. Thiselton, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics: The Theory and Practice of Transforming Biblical Readings*, London: HarperCollins/Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992, 6.

³⁵ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, (trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall), (2nd ed.), London/New York: Continuum, 2004, 424.

³⁶ Robert W. Funk, *Language, Hermeneutic and the Word of God. The Problem of Language in New Testament and Contemporary Theology*, New York: Harper & Row, 1966, 10.

³⁷ Anthony C. Thiselton, *The Two Horizons. New Testament Hermeneutics and Philosophical Description with Special Reference to Heidegger, Bultmann, Gadamer and Wittgenstein*, Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1980, 11.

In the field of the New Testament, feminist criticism rose awareness to the fact Biblical writings are rooted in specific times and places. These also correspond to particular historical situations and even more, the history to which they refer is a *patriarchal history*.³⁸

Ensuingly, Biblical writings are not in the first sense historical documents, but human statements of faith. As such, their 'historicity' is limited to being "formulated against the background of a different time and an alien image of the world".³⁹

Therefore a feminist critique is both aware of the distant socio-historical context of the writings, namely a patriarchal culture, and lays an emphasis on gender-critical, or related matters.

The feminist print keeps the social focus alive, by re-evaluating the current delineation of the issue concerning the validity of past realities for contemporary women, while at the same time, examining the validity of interpretation for the current context.

Academic objectivity is, in the weak sense, opposed to 'subjectivity'. In the more moderate sense, it means 'unbiased', 'disinterested'. The second meaning is very much relevant for the current analysis, while the first serves the interests of a socio-pragmatic type of exegesis, as it will be shown at a later phase.

Applying a narrow understanding of 'objectivity' can result into petrifying the text, and as a result making its interpretation irrelevant for the present context.

Subsequently, a growing recognition of the fact that any interpretation of texts entails certain presuppositions was expressed, and as such, by its very nature, interpretation is largely, a subjective endeavour.

To account for such a perspective, the concept of the *hermeneutical circle* was advanced,⁴⁰ in which understanding and interpretation(s) are connected in a circular fashion.

In order to understand the whole, one must engage in understanding the individual. At the same time, understanding the parts ensues in comprehension of the whole.

Prior to arriving to full understanding, one notes a stage called *pre-understanding*, or preliminary understanding⁴¹. This type of understanding is only provisional,⁴² for it can be modified by a later understanding, in view of obtaining the fuller (not final!) understanding

³⁸ Maretha M. Jacobs, The Work of Daphne Hampson: The God-talk of one Feminist Theologian, in: *Harvard Theological Studies* 63(1)/2007, 231-259, 236.

³⁹ Fander, *Historical-Critical Methods*, 217.

⁴⁰ Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Hermeneutics: The Hand Written Manuscripts*, Heinz Kimmerle (ed.), James Duke, Jack Forstman (transl.), Missoula: Scholar's Press, 1977, 99-100, 110, 112-127.

⁴¹ This reference one attributes to Schleiermacher's *Vorverständnis*. For details cf. Anthony C. Thiselton, *Hermeneutics. An Introduction*, Grand Rapids, Michigan/ Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009, 13.

⁴² Thiselton, *The Two Horizons*, 323.

of the text. As such, the fuller understanding stems from our historical and cultural anchoring propagated in a tradition of interpretations.

A very important concept was introduced, namely that of *horizon*, what in a metaphorical use aims “to denote the limits of thought as dictated by a given viewpoint or perspective.”⁴³ As a result, when we interpret, we bring in our own prejudices (*Vorurteile*), therefore the interpretation is nothing but the “fusion of horizons” (*Horizontverschmelzung*),⁴⁴ namely of the horizon of the text with that of the interpreter,⁴⁵ whose end result must be open and adequate for the contemporaneity of the interpreters.

*Not occasionally only, but always, the meaning of a text goes beyond its author. That is why understanding is not merely a reproductive, but always a productive attitude as well.*⁴⁶

Some have referred to the hermeneutical circle as to a hermeneutical spiral.⁴⁷ A two-movement process occurs: on the one hand, there is a constant reformation of the original pre-understanding, with a focus on the small parts, on the other hand, in the light of the transformation, it influences the larger picture, the focus being here not the small parts, but rather on the fuller meaning expressed by the compound parts.

Therefore, the final understanding attained by the hermeneutical circle or spiral is always a provisional understanding, since understanding is always context dependent and the context varies as informed by interests, focus etc.

The negotiation of meaning, like knowledge “cannot ever be wholly objective or subjective”⁴⁸, but mutual, ‘intersubjective’.

With intersubjectivity, the context becomes as important as the text, the former referring to the particular situation of either one or a specific community. It is not only time and space-bound, but also community-bound.

The fusion of horizons can only take place if we relate understanding to our tradition, as “we can understand only in terms of tradition”.⁴⁹ The latter is used in order to set the framework of our interpretation, as well as the reference and the limit for the latter. Without subjectivity being continuously analyzed against tradition, any subsequent interpretation would drift in arbitrariness.

⁴³ Thiselton, *The Two Horizons*, xix.

⁴⁴ For a thorough explanation of the concept cf. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 286-290.

⁴⁵ Charles H. Scobie, *The Ways of Our God. An Approach to Biblical Theology*, Grand Rapids, Michigan/Cambridge, UK: Eerdmans, 2003, 32.

⁴⁶ Cf. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 296.

⁴⁷ Cf. Grant Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1991, as cited in Thiselton, *Hermeneutics. An Introduction*, 14.

⁴⁸ David L. Barr, Conclusion. Choosing Between Readings: Questions and Criteria, in: David L. Barr (ed.), *Reading the Book of Revelation. A Resource for Students*, Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2004, 163-172, 168.

⁴⁹ Thiselton, *The Two Horizons*, 326.

Tradition has two dimensions worth naming: on the one hand, it entails elements which are part of the theological discourse, namely the reflection on the revelation of God, on the other hand, such discourse is always set within the parametres of human experience. Ensuingly, tradition deposits the series of experience, while at the same time allows the new, deeper dimensions to unfold.

The category of *tradition* has been also principal with the engagement of feminists with the Bible. The latter is neither to be perceived as a “storehouse in antiquity” or a “repository of historical facts”⁵⁰ having an unquestionable authority, nor as addressing modern day problems in particular, as some fundamentalist Biblicist⁵¹ readings tend to show.

Tradition offers a common system of symbols, which enables an analytical pursuit.

It also provides the locus of divinity-based experience translated in the same corpus of symbols.

As a result, for feminists, tradition is not “that which happened”, but rather “that which is remembered”⁵², something to which Lone Fatum also concedes: “tradition is not history as it actually happened”⁵³ and with this perspective, historical judgments –in Schüssler-Fiorenza’s formulation –become “intersubjectively understandable and intersubjectively verifiable”.⁵⁴

However, just like with previous categories analyzed, there are some limits: when assuming subjectivity, or biasness in interpreting a Biblical text without reporting the text to a tradition of interpretations, there is always the danger of diminishing one’s analytical judgment.

The hermeneutical circle forming with a gender-informed interpretation is marked by provisioness, as it stands in relation to a tradition of other interpretations.

⁵⁰ Schüssler-Fiorenza, *Wisdom Ways*, 45.

⁵¹ With the term ‘biblicist’ applied to a feminist approach, I follow Lone Fatum’s remark: “(...) that feminist theological insight and experience of spirituality have to be authorized by Scripture, legitimated if not by canon then at least by a canon within a canon” (see Lone Fatum, *Women, Symbolic Universe and Structures of Silence. Challenges and Possibilities in Androcentric Texts*, in: *Studia Theologica*, 43/1989, 61-80, 63), or when applied to interpreters: “those who think that every text must be fitted to their Christian framework”, also see Morgan, *Feminist Theological Interpretation of the New Testament*, 17.

⁵² Elizabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza, *Bread Not Stone: The Challenge of Feminist Biblical Interpretations*, Boston: Beacon Press, 1984, 93-115.

⁵³ Fatum, *Women, Symbolic Universe and Structures of Silence*, 64.

⁵⁴ Elizabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza, *Remembering the Past in Creating the Future. Historical-Critical Scholarship and Feminist Biblical Interpretation*, in: Adela Yarbro Collins (ed.), *Feminist Perspectives in Biblical Scholarship*, (Society for Biblical Literature Centennial Publications 10), Atlanta: Scholars Press, 43-64, 53, also published in: eadem, *Bread not Stone*, 93-116.

Feminist Biblical scholars should not disregard the existing Christian tradition of text's interpretations, even if, culturally and historically, this tradition is deeply patriarchal and androcentric.

Without cross-checking the historical approach with tradition, escalates the danger of provoking a high level of arbitrariness, which in turn may transform descriptive texts into prescriptive ones.⁵⁵ Such a deviant understanding lies on the fact that all texts are created equal, or all texts have an equal revelatory character. However, we know this is not the case and a distinction between the prescriptive and the descriptive material is imposed.

Such an attribute as *value-neutrality* is highly inadequate for Biblical criticism. Nevertheless, Edgar McKnight salvages the above-mentioned notion for this particular domain, by ascribing it literary undertones. He maintains that validity has other coordinates than those propagated in the earlier Era, and as such it "is a result of the reading's connecting not with the author of the original text but with a community of readers."⁵⁶

Additionally, once we acknowledge the existence of historical-conditionedness we can no longer speak of 'unbiased' interpretation.

As previously shown, our own historical situatedness shapes our pre-understanding which makes the condition for approaching a text for interpretation. Moreover, the historicity of the interpreter, his/her social status as well as personal perspective influence the type of approach one undertakes when applying a hermeneutical analysis on any given Biblical text.

Accepting the particularity of the interpreter in its entirety and of his/her interpretation underlines also the fact that the gender-related approach is one option among the many.⁵⁷

Furthermore, such an approach acknowledges that feminist interpretation is part of a chain of interpretations, all informed by the contemporary social and historical context of the interpreters and shaped to a certain extent by our theological questions.

⁵⁵ Fatum, *Women, Symbolic Universe and Structures of Silence*, 64, cf. Fander, *Historical-Critical Methods*, 220.

⁵⁶ Edgar V. McKnight, *A Sheep in Wolf's Clothing: An Option in Contemporary New Testament Hermeneutics*, in: Elizabeth Struthers Malbon, Edgar V. McKnight (eds.), *The New Literary Criticism and The New Testament*, (Journal for the Study of the New Testament, Supplement Series 109), Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994, 326-347, 344.

⁵⁷ Since the scope of the current analysis revolves on naming and delineating several orientations displayed by the feminist biblical scholarship, situated at the confluence between historical, literary, social and theological insights, I consider that an extensive analysis of the term exceeds the scope of my dissertation. However, for more information on feminist standpoint theories, as subsumed to feminist epistemology, along with feminist empiricism and feminist postmodernism cf. Anderson, *Mapping Feminist Biblical Criticism*, 25 as well as the references elaborated in the footnote section of the article concerning this issue.

The specific categories of feminist discourse stem from the “asymmetric gender relations” as shaped by patriarchy and imbued with androcentrism. While patriarchy is defined among the feminists as “a complex system of male dominance [...] involving religious, political, economic and other factors” situated at “the intersection of age, race, religion, class and gender”⁵⁸, the latter term, coined by Schüssler-Fiorenza⁵⁹ denotes the academically accepted masculine point of view of both Biblical textual redaction and its subsequent interpretation.

There are several hypotheses as to explicate gender asymmetry or inequality as societal phenomenon.

Following a historical method, Schüssler-Fiorenza’s theory rests on the assumption that the inequality we perceive is not a result of Jesus Movement, but rather it crystalized along the centuries in the tradition of interpretation, which in turn legitimates the structures of oppression, by advancing the patriarchal interests and preferences,⁶⁰ which regulate the concept of ‘normality’.

Without any doubt, the Church tradition with regard to Biblical interpretation is androcentric. Feminist practice is praxis-oriented, because Elizabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza locates the starting point outside the text itself. The text’s interpretations are androcentric and subservient to patriarchal interests. In the Jesus Movement, women played equal roles, active leaders.⁶¹

However, a critical distance is imposed. As a result, one should keep in mind the fact that the 21st century readers have nothing but the text as the main medium of recorded 1st century practice.

In this way, such an explanation as Schüssler-Fiorenza’s may be an oversimplification of the conditions existing in Antiquity. Careful attention to cultural, social environment and practice may provide useful insights into ancient societal generic asymmetry.

⁵⁸ Anderson, Mapping Feminist Biblical Criticism, 23. Male dominance is not tantamount with women being devoid of “rights, influence and resources, but holds that it is usually men who wield power in all important institution of society”, and this is a nuance one needs to acknowledge, cf: Eryl Wynn Davies, *The Dissenting Reader. Feminist Approaches to the Hebrew Bible*, Ashgate: UK, 2003, 15, (ft.26).

⁵⁹ Cf. Elizabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza, Der Beitrag der Frau zur urchristlichen Bewegung. Kritische Überlegungen zur Rekonstruktion urchristlicher Geschichte, in: W. Schottroff, W. Stegemann (eds.), *Traditionen der Befreiung. Sozialgeschichtliche Bibelauslegungen II (Frauen in der Bibel)*, Chr. Kaiser Verlag: München/Burckhardthaus-Laetare Verlag: Berlin, 1980, 60-90, eadem: *Brott statt Steine*, 2-8, 15-18.

⁶⁰ Cf. Elizabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins*, (10th edition) New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1994.

⁶¹ The egalitarian character of the Jesus Movement received ample criticism, starting with the fact that if one starts from the premise that all texts are androcentric and patriarchal, one could seriously doubt the authenticity of the egalitarian occasional emphases on the discipleship of women present in some of the writings of the NT. For further information cf. Anderson, Mapping Feminist Biblical Criticism, 32.

As stated above, the pressing problem of feminists was that the *interpretation* of the sacred texts was responsible for having perverted the equal rights of women.

Any interpretative endeavour along the centuries that is denying neutrality and objectivity is qualified as 'gendered': "the result of process whereby the text is interpreted through the lens of readers' experience, and if the readers of the text are male, then the interpretation which is arrived at will likely be masculinist".⁶²

To the above mentioned critique adds another one: the Bible, born and bred in a patriarchal culture, proves the biasness of its writings, incentivizing the feminist approach to question these texts' normative authority. Such a rationalization allows for alternative readings and interpretations to emerge.

*"A 'feminist' reading [...] must, time and again rearticulate its categories and focus its lenses of interpretation in particular historical situations and social contexts. It may not subscribe to a single method of analysis, nor adopt a single hermeneutical perspective or mode of approach. It also may not restrict itself to one single reading community or audience. Rather, it must search for appropriate theoretical frameworks and practical ways of interpretation that can make visible oppressive as well as liberative traces inscribed in ancient Jewish and Christian Scriptures [...]."*⁶³

Issues such as *historicity*, *particularity* or *contextuality*, *social* orientation, aiming at a *liberation theology* reoccur when delineating the claims of feminist hermeneutics.

Subsequently, meaning can never be decontextualized and this argument is used to diminish the strength of the feminist claim concerning the androcentrism with the Bible. Although I concur to the generalized assumption that the Bible is an androcentric text, one should bear in mind, it is not less androcentric than any other text, since the cultural conditioning of any text is something indelible.⁶⁴

Related to the above, another category relevant for a gender-related analysis is a revolutionary intellectual focus on 'man'.

Accordingly, Schüssler-Fiorenza observes that 'man' was *par excellence* the subject to which scientific knowledge was measured and the interpretation was subsequently shaped in an androcentric theoretical paradigm.⁶⁵

⁶² Victoria S. Harrison, Modern Women, Traditional Abrahamic Religions and Interpreting Sacred Texts, in: *Feminist Theology: The Journal of the Britain & Ireland School of Feminist Theology*, 15(2)/2007, 145-159, 156.

⁶³ Elizabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza, Introduction: Transforming the Legacy of *The Woman's Bible*, in: Elizabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza (ed.), *Searching the Scriptures, Volume 1*, 1-27, 18.

⁶⁴ Phyllis Bird, The Authority of the Bible, in: Leander E. Keck et al. (eds.), *The New Interpreter's Bible*, (vol. 1), Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994, 33-64.

⁶⁵ Schüssler-Fiorenza, Remembering the Past in Creating the Future, 55.

As a result, women were objectified. By the reconceptualization of language and the paradigmatic shift in interpretation, feminist theologians hope to envision a status change of women from objects to subjects.

Moreover, feminists envision in the academic interest from the Enlightenment onwards a generic anchoring of the categories of *man/woman* in the *male/female* ones.

In other words, differentiating between the biological sex (male/female) and the socio-cultural identity (man/woman) is not only important but also necessary.

The feminist theory in its sociological substratum claims that neither *man*, nor *male* can be equated with the whole of humanity.⁶⁶

Therefore, androcentric experience, its arguments and historical development do not describe adequately reality in its completeness.

It is within this framework that the gendered category of *woman* emerges and develops, having subsequently the concept's cognates reexamined and revalued. Of these, *experience* becomes highly important.

Since *experience* functions on more than one *pallier*, or level, all of which are relevant for a gender-informed perspective, I will discuss it in the following subsections both from a sociological and a literary perspective.

The means of action pertaining to the feminist strategy dealing with patriarchy and androcentrism include the application of a *hermeneutics of suspicion*⁶⁷ to the texts of the Bible, more exactly to "the rhetorical constructions of the Bible"⁶⁸, which prompted the importance of the understanding of the historical context in which particular texts occurred and as a result de-patriarchalizing them.

The concept of *hermeneutics of suspicion*, was originally introduced by Paul Ricoeur,⁶⁹ whose work is very important for the proper understanding of a gendered-informed perspective, will be dealt with at large in the upcoming subsection concerning the socio-literary influences on the feminist approach.

With feminists in particular, *hermeneutics of suspicion* is a tool used to investigate and scrutinize Biblical texts for their possible androcentric assumptions and positions⁷⁰, as well

⁶⁶ Cf. Schüssler-Fiorenza, *Der Beitrag der Frau zur urchristlichen Bewegung*, 62-63 .

⁶⁷ The current formulation bearing relevance for the gender-informed perspective belongs to and was explained by Schüssler-Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*, 2-95, also eadem, *Bread not Stone*, 15-18.

⁶⁸ Marie-Theres Wacker, *Feminist Criticism and Related Aspects*, in: J. W. Rogerson and Judith M. Lieu (eds.), *Oxford Handbook of Biblical Studies*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2006, 634-654, 641.

⁶⁹ Paul Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970, 27: "Hermeneutics seems to me to be animated by this double motivation: willingness to suspect, willingness to listen; vow of rigor, vow of obedience."

⁷⁰ Schüssler-Fiorenza, *Bread Not Stone*, 15.

as unarticulated interests of contemporary Biblical interpretations⁷¹ revolving around texts' "ideological functions in the interest of domination".⁷² It is also "concerned with the distorted ways in which women's presences and practices are constructed and represented in and through kyriocentric language and media."⁷³

Additionally, a hermeneutics of suspicion scrutinizes the presupposition and interests of interpreters and those of Biblical commentators,⁷⁴ evoking here as well, just like previously, the double conditionedness of this strategy.

Even if in case of feminist approaches, the above-mentioned concept refers not necessarily to the philosophy or theory of language, but entails rather societal and patriarchal velleities, such undertones become even more relevant with the in-depth analysis of the exclusions exercised by the patriarchal system. A hermeneutics of suspicion "does not presuppose the feminist authority and truth of the Bible, but takes as its starting point the assumption that Biblical texts and their interpretations are androcentric and serve patriarchal functions."⁷⁵

Its novelty for the feminist approach relies in the fact that it activates awareness regarding 'gender', 'race', 'class', 'prejudices' and 'biases', inscribed in the Biblical discourse, for a betterment of self-knowledge, as well as their functions in everyday life.

The scopes of hermeneutics of suspicion unfold critically: when we read texts such as the Bible, we rapport ourselves to the Christian tradition, while bearing in mind that the 'familiar' either represented or transmitted can become different. This may occur once we point out origins and biases and ask questions about the author(s), audience(s), and finally expose the ethical values of good and bad handed down as 'givens' along centuries.

Therefore, what feminists try to disclose is precisely the gender biases, which were at the very core both of writing the text in question, but also of the subsequent interpretations of Biblical texts.

Very often Schüssler-Fiorenza pairs the concept with that of 'historical reconstruction', while opposing it at the theoretical level with the *hermeneutics of respect, acceptance, consent* and *obedience* dictated by the Biblical text.⁷⁶

Just like her, feminist hermeneutical commentators are not simply satisfied with only unmasking patriarchy, but go on to mention that a *hermeneutics of reconstruction* through remembrance⁷⁷ is required.

⁷¹ Schüssler-Fiorenza, *Bread Not Stone*, 16.

⁷² Schüssler-Fiorenza, *Wisdom Ways*, 175.

⁷³ Schüssler-Fiorenza, *Wisdom Ways*, 176.

⁷⁴ Elizabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza, Art. Feminist Hermeneutics, in: David Noel Freedman (ed.), *Anchor Bible Dictionary* (vol. 2), New York: Doubleday, 1992, 783-791, 790.

⁷⁵ Schüssler-Fiorenza, *Bread Not Stone*, 15.

⁷⁶ Schüssler-Fiorenza, *Wisdom Ways*, 175.

A hermeneutics of remembrance reclaims the past suffering of women and of all persons subjugated through enslavement, exile, and maltreatment⁷⁸ and presents theoretical models for historical reconstructions, in which women are placed at the centre of Biblical community and theology.

There are also voices, Lone Fatum included, who doubt the accommodation of the double claim by the feminist projects of reading the Scriptures, namely of exposing the suppressive character of the texts with regard to women and at the same time reconstructing the Biblical material by seeking an affirmation of women, all of which accomplished by using one analytical process.⁷⁹ It would be suffice to say that a deconstruction, or simply exposing a patriarchal construction⁸⁰ fully meet the demands of relevant gender-informed critique.

Neglecting this aspect transforms the text fundamentally, as per the agenda of some feminists, 'blinded by apologetics'.⁸¹

A derailment of the above mentioned process of deconstruction could potentially result into the forceful and artificial transformation of a descriptive text into a prescriptive one, by overlooking the textual evidence, either by performing a selective analysis, or by explaining away the difficult passages.

Consequently, the fundamentalist feminist interpreters read what they want to read, serving the interests of the feminist apologetics they represent.

This sad occurrence would be in Eco's terms a crass misuse of the text.⁸²

Provisional Conclusions (1)

The dissatisfaction of the feminists with various expressions of the historical-critical method finds legitimation in the different theoretical nuances it adduces from the historical, social and literary sources. This feminist endeavour rests on the assumption that "the Biblical message transcends the particularity of its context and becomes part of our world today and can therefore speak to the present."⁸³

⁷⁷ Schüssler-Fiorenza, *Bread Not Stone*, 17.

⁷⁸ Schüssler-Fiorenza, *Bread Not Stone*, 17, 19.

⁷⁹ Fatum, *Women, Symbolic Universe and Structures of Silence*, 61.

⁸⁰ Fatum, *Women, Symbolic Universe and Structures of Silence*, 62.

⁸¹ Fatum, *Women, Symbolic Universe and Structures of Silence*, 62.

⁸² Cf. Umberto Eco, *Limits of Interpretation*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991.

⁸³ Justin Ukpog, *Reading the Bible in the Global Village: Issues and Challenges from African Readings*, in: J. Ukpog, M. W. Dube, and G. O. West (eds.), *Reading the Bible in the Global Village*, Atlanta: Society for Biblical Literature, 2002, 9-40, 17.

Just like the historical-critical method, feminist critique rests on the acknowledgement that Biblical texts carry a sacred message and as such their formulation is human, historically and culturally conditioned. However, as such they bear a patriarchal imprint, which becomes the main critical category of any analytical feminist endeavour.

Moreover, the historical conditioning informs our competences, affects our reading, evaluation and understanding. The notion of the *hermeneutical circle* as setting the framework of our analysis⁸⁴ is very much important for the feminist Biblical exegesis from the perspective of historical study, for its results are continuously changing.

The legitimation for a historical scholarly enterprise for the study of the New Testament is given by the fact that there is a gap between our contemporary world and the ancient context of the New Testament, which can be bridged only by the expertise of the historically working scholar.⁸⁵

Regarding the main distinction between a historian and a theologian, Schüssler-Fiorenza notes: “the Biblical exegete and theologian, in contrast with the historian of Antiquity, never searches solely for the historical meaning of a passage, but also raises the question of the Bible’s meaning and authority for today”.⁸⁶

The anchorage in reality, furthermore informed by hermeneutical circle is actually conducted by a hermeneutics of suspicion aiming to expose biases and to legitimate the contextual approach of a gender-informed method. For this, the formation and functions of a hermeneutical circle is a prerequisite.

Besides the fact that the hermeneutical circle forms and functions as I described above, gender-critical analysis holds it relevant by the fact the socio-historical, as well as cultural context of women engaged with feminist exegesis inform their understanding(s).

Therefore the fragmentation, which is noticeable today in the larger feminist discourse is due precisely to the fact that understanding(s) and interests for exegesis are contextual. Moreover the hermeneutical circle formed by applying the hermeneutic of suspicion is rooted in gendered experience. Nevertheless, the hermeneutics of suspicion has its limitations.

When using it as a positivist historical hermeneutic approach, it results in a loss of its theological relevance and sensitivity for postmodern context, moreover for pastoral use. However, it cannot be overlooked that a complete elimination of the historical-critical method in hermeneutics would lead to a misappropriation of the Biblical texts, manifested in a one-sided type of reading, which does not address either the context of redaction, or

⁸⁴ Fatum, *Women, Symbolic Universe and Structures of Silence*, 63.

⁸⁵ A. K. M. Adam, *Faithful Interpretation. Reading the Bible in a Postmodern World*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006, 12.

⁸⁶ Schüssler-Fiorenza, *Bread Not Stone*, 46.

the contemporary relevance of the text. It would be just to serve certain agendas of some feminist scholars, without much textual support, as the nature of its arguments could be precritical, or uncritical, or retrodictive.⁸⁷

The historical-critical method and implicitly, the acknowledgement of the importance of historical context pertaining to Biblical redaction and reception offer a counterpoint to the gender-informed perspective. Without it, the danger of projecting our contemporary interpretation onto the Biblical text is too great.

Further, lacking the historical understanding of the texts regarding the multiple traditions evidenced in the Bible tantamount to one easily ascribing a revelatory character to all Biblical statements.

This could in turn lead to misogynist, at times conflicting interpretations.⁸⁸

Furthermore, an overly biased historical study cannot adequately discern the existing conditions in Antiquity.⁸⁹

What belongs to the transmission of the Biblical text is always to be analyzed against the tradition in which the text grows, develops its meanings and such a fact is made possible by the employment of the historical-critical method. Biblicist and fundamentalist interpretations can become traps that an educated reader must avoid.

In a concluding positive key, there are at least two preconditions from the historical-critical method that any feminist should value, namely that the Bible evidentiates multiple traditions and God has spoken via human beings (*Dei Verbum II*). Also, it helps us differentiate between the redaction and tradition of a text interpretation.

From the analysis above, one can also notice that a pure employment of the historical-critical method is not enough for present exegesis. Even if the socio-historical context in which some texts originated is crucial for their theological grasping, the new perspective on history reshapes our understanding on the situation the *original* text might have addressed.

⁸⁷ For a clarification of this terminology cf. the social perspective informing the gendered approach as present in the current analysis.

⁸⁸ Fander, *Historical-Critical Methods*, 213.

⁸⁹ Wacker, *Part One: Historical Hermeneutical and Methodological Foundations*, 46.

1.2 Approaches from Socio-critical Perspective

From a historical approach we move into a more concrete and particular expression of historical conditioning, namely that of individual life.

There is a certain degree of timelessness pertaining to sociological theory, very often associated with universality.

“Sociology looks for what is general or typical in any given society and seeks to find similar models elsewhere,” [...] resting on the assumption “that all societies function in more or less similar ways.”⁹⁰

Nevertheless, such an observation finds itself only apparently in an incompatible relationship with the category discussed in the previous subsection, for history insists “on the uniqueness of any given society’s development.”⁹¹

Something that sociologists do not agree upon is the universal validity of a model of anything materialized in a standard for everything.⁹²

This is why a rigid understanding of timelessness in delineating the sociological approach is rejected.

There is actually a special type of temporality describing human existence. Such existence resides at the confluence of historical, cultural as well biological conditioning.

It is never universal, and although the external factors may be found in all societies, the manner in which every human being relates to these factors is individual, personal, and even unique.

Subsequently, historical conditionedness does not solely involve a historical character per se, but also a cultural dimension informed by a gendered existence, and those three coordinates are extremely relevant for a gender-informed approach.

Because the existential and epistemological coordinates of the historical dimension have been mentioned above, and the description of the cultural one will be postponed for a later analysis in this subsection, I will refer to gender in what follows.

As previously mentioned, the social orientation, starting with the mid 1970’s adduces *gender*, as social identity and construction, more precisely “an understanding of gender as performative and thus socially constructed, and conversely, as socially constructed and

⁹⁰ Gerald Lewis Bray, *Biblical Interpretation: Past and Present*, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1996, 511.

⁹¹ Bray, *Biblical Interpretation: Past and Present*, 512.

⁹² Bray, *Biblical Interpretation: Past and Present*, 512. Bray gives the following example to strengthen his argument: “If Israel was unique [...], it is hard to see how or why it should serve as a model for Christians now”.

thus performative”⁹³ to the critique of the historical-critical method.⁹⁴ As category, the cultural construction which interests any feminist approach, i.e. gender never appears alone in any discourse but always with its theoretical corollary, including parametres such as ‘race’, ‘class’ and ‘ethnicity’.

It is important to note that for feminism, the roots of such a legitimation of gender go as far back as the incipient stages of the Women’s Movement, initially a social movement preoccupied with an increasing involvement of women in society, materialized in gaining political representativeness and visibility as expressed in the suffragist rights and militating further for educational and economical rights.

The political dimension acts as a catalyst in the societal expression of women because the ‘personal’ is ‘political’. ⁹⁵ Therefore, gender has political implications and gender power is tantamount to class power. Gender is not merely “a matter of difference, but a matter of power”.⁹⁶

As per the socio-critical perspective, the social and political relevance became the criteria for the gender-informed approach.

Since the Bible is a foundational document of our culture, Biblical interpretation is considered to incorporate a dynamic on-going process by which people consciously and critically appropriate the Holy Writ and its message from within the perspectives and with the resources of their cultures.⁹⁷

In general, reading is considered a social activity,⁹⁸ texts have a political function and interpreting the Bible has implications, as well as impact on both ecclesial and cultural

⁹³ Angela Bauer, Jeremiah as Female Impersonator: Roles of Difference in Gender Perception and Gender Perceptivity, in: Harold C. Washington, Susan Lochrie Graham and Pamela Thimmes (eds.), *Escaping Eden. New Feminist Perspectives on Bible*, Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999, 199-207, 202.

⁹⁴ Mary Ann Tolbert, Social, Sociological and Anthropological Methods, in: Elizabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza (ed.), *Searching the Scriptures, Volume 1*, 255-271, 255.

⁹⁵ Herlinde Pissarek-Hudelist, Mann und Frau in der Sicht der feministischen Theologie, in: Theodor Schneider (ed.), *Mann und Frau –Grundproblem Theologischer Anthropologie*, (Quaestiones disputatae 121), Freiburg, Basel, Wien: Herder, 1989, 73-123, 76.

⁹⁶ Danna Nolan Fewell, Reading the Bible Ideologically. Feminist Criticism, in: Steven L. McKenzie, Stephen R. Haynes (eds.), *An Introduction to Biblical Criticism and Their Application. To Each its Own Meaning*, Louisville: John Knox Press, 1999, 268- 282, 275.

⁹⁷ Justin S. Ukpong, Inculturation as Decolonization of Biblical Studies in Africa, in: S. O. Abogunrin (ed.) *Decolonization of Biblical Interpretation in Africa*, Ibadan, Nigeria: Nigeria Association of Biblical Studies, 2005, 35.

⁹⁸ Thimmes, What Makes a Feminist Reading Feminist? Another Perspective, 136.

institutions.⁹⁹ The Bible is viewed as a text that is anchored in the socio-historical settings of its authors, and yet plurivalent enough to speak meaningfully to different environments across space and time and by doing so, it gains the character of a political act.

Just like any societal expressions, texts (Biblical texts included) are permeated by ideological stances wherein ideology is defined as “an integrated system of beliefs, assumptions and values, not necessarily true or false, which reflect the needs and interests of a group, or a class at a particular time in history”.¹⁰⁰

Subsequently, a dialectic of liberation presupposes a critique of androcentric or patriarchal ideology.¹⁰¹

Ideology is embedded in discourse, i.e. “special languages used by social groups”,¹⁰² it is also found in the feminist discourse.

This reality points to the fact that ideology is not necessarily items which can be located in the text, but that it is evident as a characteristic of relationships existing in our society.

Since the reality wherein we live is patriarchal, we can only perceive from our patriarchal context,¹⁰³ that there are certain ways of reading and interpreting *a priori*, which serve to confirm and legitimate prejudices, traditions, attitudes, social relationships.

The economic component of patriarchy also played an important role in turning to and keeping women in a state of dependence in relation to men a practice that was not particularly empowering throughout the centuries for women in general.

Feminist theorists attempt at unmasking the androcentrism –and its correlates sexism and misogyny –existing in contemporary society, as well as at depatriarchalizing the textual interpretations in the theological discourse.

From this perspective, readers are socially conditioned entities. They are not ideal, abstract textual constructions. They are human beings, who can be often placed under various oppressive political systems, manifested in the sustained humiliation of a group, based on various factors deemed unfavourable by the leading forces.

⁹⁹ Pamela Thimmes, Making Boundaries Inside and Outside: The Ongoing Task of Feminist Hermeneutics, in: Harold C. Washington, Susan Lochrie Graham and Pamela Thimmes (eds.), *Escaping Eden. New Feminist Perspectives on Bible*, Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999, 279-282, 280-281.

¹⁰⁰ David Brian Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution 1770-1823*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1975, 14, cf. Vernon K. Robbins, Socio- Rhetorical Criticism: Mary, Elizabeth and the Magnificat as a Test Case, in: Elizabeth Struthers Malbon, Edgar V. McKnight (eds.), *The New Literary Criticism and The New Testament*, 164-209, 194.

¹⁰¹ Thiselton, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics*, 385f.

¹⁰² Anderson, Mapping Feminist Biblical Criticism, 26.

¹⁰³ Margaret B. Adam, This is My Story, This is My Song...: A Feminist Claim on the Scripture, Ideology and Interpretation, in: Harold C. Washington, Susan Lochrie Graham and Pamela Thimmes (eds.): *Escaping Eden. New Feminist Perspectives on Bible*, Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999, 218-232, 220.

To certain extent, by virtue of their response as well as contemporary anchoring in social realities, readers or interpreters hold authority over the Biblical text, for the interpretive community is the one, “who experience God’s presence in their struggle for liberation.”¹⁰⁴

Such changes could not have been adopted in the theological field, or even come into effect, had it not been for the more pregnant academic interest in *liberation theology*.

It is defined as a theological expression, which makes “a preferential option for the oppressed; it tries to look at society from the standpoint of *what will help* in their liberation, and *through their eyes*”.¹⁰⁵ For liberation theologians, there is a strong anchoring in the social realities.

Thus the formulations of liberation theologies are initiated in Latin America “as a response to the extreme social injustice in that part of the world”.¹⁰⁶

An important point is that the relationship between hermeneutics and praxis, which was always crucial for the gender-informed approach, stems from the very transformative character of liberation theologies.¹⁰⁷ The latter does not just simply stop at criticizing the socio-political character of the oppression and marginalization, but offers theoretical models which aim at transformation.¹⁰⁸ It is within the framework provided by the liberation theologies that the term *concientización*, translated as ‘constituentization’, or ‘consciousness-raising’ emerged. It arose in the context where the pedagogue Paulo Freire

¹⁰⁴ Alice Ogden Bellis, *Feminist Biblical Scholarship*, in: Carol Meyers, Toni Craven, Ross S. Kraemer (eds.), *Women in Scripture. A Dictionary of the Unnamed Women in the Hebrew Bible, the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books and the New Testament*, Grand Rapids, Michigan/ Cambridge, UK: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 24-32, 27.

¹⁰⁵ Leonardo Boff, *What are Third World Theologies?* In: *Concilium*, 199(5)/1988, 3-13, 11.

¹⁰⁶ Bray, *Biblical Interpretation: Past and Present*, 516.

¹⁰⁷ There are different articulations of the interests with liberation theologies. Besides the unmasking of patriarchy and androcentrism evident with the feminist approach, one can also notice the insistence of the Asian theologians on reading the Bible in the context informed by postcolonialism, or the womanist pursuit to point at the racial motifs of the Bible etc. Leaving aside the ethnical dimension of these approaches, the Bible is also questioned with regard to its teachings, as perceived from the perspective of less economically favoured, i.e. the poor, or the culturally preferred, i.e. the oppressed. For further reading cf. R. S. Sugirtharajah (ed.) *Voices from the Margin: Interpreting the Bible in the Third World*, Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1991 or Norman K. Gottwald and Richard A. Horsley (eds.) *The Bible and Liberation: Political and Social Hermeneutics*, Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1983.

¹⁰⁸ On the transformative effect feminist approach has, cf. Thimmes, *What makes A Feminist Reading Feminist? Another Perspective*, 135; Patrocinio P. Schweickart, *Toward a Feminist Theory of Reading*, in: Elizabeth A. Flynn and Patrocinio P. Schweickart (eds.) *Gender and Reading: Essays on Readers, Texts and Contexts*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986, 31-62, 9; Schüssler-Fiorenza, *Transforming the Legacy of the Women’s Bible*, 18.

activated.¹⁰⁹ Socio-critical inquiry and critique is part of the consciousness-raising process, advocated so much by feminist theorists.

Aiming at *conciétización*, liberation theologies contain a subjective orientation, besides a societal one: among other, they attempt liberation from projections, from negative self-images, from hierarchical thought-models.¹¹⁰ With the gender-informed approach, subjectivity bears a double orientation: one it stems from experience, the other is associated to women's experience. That is why feminist writers do not write not as women, or not only as outsiders in defense of "the oppressed", but as insiders who are concerned with oppression in terms of gender.

The understanding of the concept of 'tradition' is relevant to the feminist approach. It mainly refers to the fact that Biblical texts have been read and interpreted along the centuries in a certain way, which is neither innocent, nor empowering for women. *Au contraire*, there has been a systematic disregard concerning women's experience of marginalization and oppression.

Oppression of women, as social materializes in an endless matter an "endless variety and monotonous similarity, cross-culturally and throughout history."¹¹¹ In the feminists' understanding, women are oppressed either because of biological insufficiencies, or because of their precarious economic or social status.

Marginalization is both cause and result of the invisibility of women in societal discourse. It is either achieved by stereotyping, or by conceiving women as men, as well as by anonymity. In case of textual representativeness, marginalization is achieved limiting itself at presenting women's issues as isolated accounts, more accurately perceived as accidents rather than real issues.

As shown above, from a sociological point of view with generic relevance, 'gender' locks in itself women's experience of marginalization and oppression. Such experience does not remain unique in its own, but bears cultural and societal reverberations having an alienating role for women.

Every society is permeated by unjust structures. Securing superior positions in a society with a patriarchal structure is implemented very often by stereotyping the roles, in this case, gender-roles.

¹⁰⁹ Thiselton, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics*, 416.

¹¹⁰ C. M. J. Halkes, *Gott hat nicht nur starke Söhne. Grundzüge einer feministischen Theologie*, Gütersloher: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1980, 25.

¹¹¹ Gayle Rubin, *The Traffic in Women: Notes on the 'Political Economy' of Sex*, in: Rayna Reiter (ed.), *Toward and Anthropology of Women*, New York: Monthly Review Press, 1975, 157-210, 160.

Because of the high degree of stereotyping, feminist approaches draw attention to the fact that Biblical images of women have shaped cultural understanding.

In response, it advances the idea of reading Biblical texts, whilst displaying sensitivity to gender issues, even if some of these were not particularly flattering for women in general as they entered our present cultural understanding. Therefore, it is enough to name a whole set of information and associations are created should one be called for example Jezebel, Delilah, Eve or Deborah, Ruth etc.

Even more so, another cultural stereotype very relevant in the current discussion for its generic undertones is the 'human body'. In its gendered existence, lie the rationales accounting for the marginalization and oppression of women. Without reiterating the struggle between essentialists and constructionists,¹¹² female body was ascribed passivity, weakness, seduction¹¹³, being subsequently acknowledged as universal historical reality by the patriarchal society.

In recent studies, feminism of the third wave gravitates towards the inseparability of nature and culture: body is not purely social or cultural.¹¹⁴ It is indeed a product of culture, but not entirely a passive recipient of cultural inscription. Additionally, "the body has its biological limits, its sex specificity and its own integrity."¹¹⁵

As I will show later, *body* very much associates with the *gendered images* in a creative fashion by employing metaphors, especially in the Biblical account of interest for the current enterprise, respectively Apocalypse 17.

From a feminist point of view, women's experience is also informed by social location, being an indicator of our culture, and bearing an imprint on the type of interpretation we conduct. Our worldview is a constructed reality drawn from more than one social context, since "most of us (though not all) have multiple perspectives from which we may interpret texts."¹¹⁶

¹¹² Cf. Wioleta Polinska, *Dangerous Bodies: Women's Nakedness and Theology*, in: *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*, 16(1)/2000, 45-62, 54. In short, this view is deeply entrenched in the dichotomous battle *nature* vs. *culture*, wherein "essentialism maintains that woman's nature has been repressed by the social order [...] constructionism [...] holds that woman's biology is generated by the social order." As a result, any difference between the sexes is based on conventional roles, rather than physiology.

¹¹³ Wioleta Polinska, *Dangerous Bodies*, 57.

¹¹⁴ Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994, 21, 187; cf. Moira Gatens, *Power, Bodies and Difference*, in: Michele Barrett and Anne Phillips (eds.), *Destabilizing Theory*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992, 120-137, 128-130.

¹¹⁵ Polinska, *Dangerous Bodies*, 54-55, in reference to Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies*, 21, 187.

¹¹⁶ Mary Ann Tolbert, *Reading For Liberation*, in: Fernando F. Segovia and Mary Ann Tolbert (eds.), *Reading from this Place: Social Location and Biblical Interpretation in the United States*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995, 263-277, 274.

The social reality in which we live, namely *patriarchy* creates a false consciousness¹¹⁷ by denying the historical and cultural conditionedness of both author and interpreter of Biblical texts. It propagates dualisms, which evidentiate social hierarchical constructions, legitimizing thus the need of one group to dominate over the other. Patriarchy is oblivious to the reality of diversity, which feminist approach embraces.

Socio-critical hermeneutics therefore offers the theoretical tool, as well as provides the framework for liberation or emancipatory hermeneutics,¹¹⁸ otherwise hindered if one does not succeed in unmasking the ideologies, which bear social determinations, subservient to external and established interests, in this case, patriarchal or androcentric ones.

More radically expressed, patriarchy was for centuries displaying a *monism*, rather than a dualism between the male and the female: in this respect, “there are not two distinct and opposed elements, but only one and its negative projection of itself onto the other. The other is defined as lack, atrophy, or diminution of the dominant element, not as an entirety with its own integrity, specificity and value.”¹¹⁹

Either considering its dualist, or its monist character, patriarchy is common for all cultures. From a theological perspective, patriarchy has one “fundamental flaw: it does not treat all human as equals”¹²⁰, which for the modern world is quite of a problem.

Uncovering androcentrism points at a theoretical shift from the paradigm of domination to one of equality that stands at the base of the Christian profession,¹²¹ wherein the former’s existence is nothing but a perversion of the latter. One should however keep in mind that especially with Biblical texts, equality between the sexes is a very modern concept and analytical lens. It more accurately circumscribes the understanding prevailing in our society, rather than realities of Biblical times.

The actual manner, in which ideology is uncovered and resisted to, is by employing ideology critique to the text having two other correlates in mind: one, the hermeneutics of suspicion, that in this case acts against preserving a certain social and cultural *status quo*; and second, the application of the hermeneutical circle, both of which rest on the acknowledgement of contextuality. This concept in particular is of crucial understanding for

¹¹⁷ The formulation was retrieved from Elizabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza, *Feminist theology and the New Testament Interpretation*, in: *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 22/1982, 32- 46, 34.

¹¹⁸ Thiselton, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics*, 379.

¹¹⁹ Mary Ann Tolbert, *Reading Bible with Authority: Feminist Interrogation of the Canon*, in: Harold C. Washington, Susan Lochrie Graham and Pamela Thimmes (eds.), *Escaping Eden. New Feminist Perspectives on Bible*, Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999, 141- 162, 159-160.

¹²⁰ Tikva Frymer-Kensky, *The Bible and Women’s Studies*, in: eadem, *Studies in Bible and Feminist Criticism*, Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 2006, 159-183, 161.

¹²¹ Morgan, *Feminist Theological Interpretation of the New Testament*, 23.

theology, because basically every theology is a contextual theology, which means that it starts and develops from a particular horizon of experience.¹²²

If we accept the shift in paradigm towards historical-conditionedness, *contextuality* and *particularity*, the manner in which the interpretation of socio-political situation in terms of oppression and marginalization based on gender copes with salvation history becomes principal.

Since both concepts of *hermeneutics of suspicion* and *hermeneutical circle* are by now not new ones, I will in the following delineate the fashion in which these associate and function with different expressions of liberation theologies among which feminism enlists.

The 'hermeneutical circle' presents itself as one of the key elements of liberation theologians' interpretation of the Bible and tradition. Instead of the individual personal dimension given by the historical conditionedness, and explained in the earlier subsection, Juan Luis Segundo, the hermeneutical theorist insists on the existence of a pattern informed by the external factors. "The continuing change in our interpretation of the Bible is dictated by the continuing changes in our present-day reality, both individual and societal"; as a result, "each new reality obliges to interpret the word of God afresh, to change reality accordingly, and then to go back and reinterpret the word of God again, and so on."¹²³

In a more accurate description of how this concept actually operates, Segundo identifies four steps:

*"Firstly there is our way of experiencing reality, which leads us to ideological suspicion. Secondly, there is application of our ideological suspicion to the whole ideological superstructure in general and to theology in particular. Thirdly, there comes a new way of experiencing theological reality that leads us to exegetical suspicion, that is, to the suspicion that the prevailing interpretation of the Bible has not taken important pieces of data into account. Fourthly we have our new hermeneutic, that is, our new way of interpreting the fountainhead of our faith (i.e. Scripture) with the new elements at our disposal."*¹²⁴

Suspicion emerges from the outside, from external realities and is projected back or carried into the text. It always aims toward a new creation, deeper than the previous, relying and informed by the data which opened up this new perspective. This is how Biblical message remained in actuality throughout the centuries, because in the interpretation of Bible, the hermeneutical circle, especially its ideology critique is adopted by most liberation theologians.

¹²² Pissarek-Hudelist, *Mann und Frau in der Sicht der feministischen Theologie*, 78.

¹²³ Luis Segundo, *Liberation of Theology*, Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1976, 8.

¹²⁴ Segundo, *Liberation of Theology*, 9.

Such a valid observation applies in the case of feminist approach, where a consciously assumed acknowledgment of the gender(ed) categories play an important role in the process of interpretation.

As presented by Segundo, entering any hermeneutical circle, while interpreting resides on the hermeneutics of suspicion.

Applying the above mentioned concepts implies a reading strategy in which the reader becomes aware of how certain biases with regard to race, class, gender, religion and economic systems are not only presented by a text, but also either confirmed or infirmed. As a result, the particular reading is critical, the text is questioned, and imaginary value-clashes between text and contemporary reader may occur.

To the historical and social parameters of reading, a socio-critical perspective includes the notion of *interest* even more so because of its rootedness in our experience.

This concept encompasses other coordinates, which are interesting for a gender-informed approach.

Among these, intersubjectivity was previously mentioned, as well as a certain amount or degree of biasness. Intersubjectivity and biasness inform our hermeneutical circle in an attempt to unmask current patriarchal ideologies. As a consequence, interest becomes very especially relevant for its practical relevance.

For the field of Biblical studies, interest is found on one hand as serving the Biblical authors' theological-pastoral intentions. Alternatively, readers' interest is evident in the process of selection, as interpretive communities hold keys to interpretations. This particular double conditionedness coordinates very well with the one of the hermeneutical enterprise mentioned at the beginning of this section, as a whole.

One should note, however, that this claim should not in any case be confused with serving the agenda of either authors or interpretive communities of the Biblical texts, but from a gender-related concern, it claims to be pointing at a "*type of injustice it seeks to eliminate. Nothing could more clearly serve to distinguish socio-critical category and practices from socio-pragmatic theory and practice*" (her italics).¹²⁵

Just like the previous citation conspicuously validates, the sociological approach with a hermeneutical relevance for the gender-informed approach pendulates between two main extremes: on the one end of its swing there are the contextual-relative socio-pragmatic type of approaches, on the other end, one enlists the metacritical and socio-critical hermeneutics.

¹²⁵ Janet Radcliffe Richards, *The Skeptical Feminist*, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1980, 17,18; cf. Thiselton, *New Horizons*, 443; idem, *Hermeneutics*, 293.

By applying a critique of ideology, social and praxis bring about an emancipatory result. In other words, this type of hermeneutics empowers and engages emancipatory as well as autonomous actions.

In case of Biblical texts, the acknowledgement and expression of the transcendental coordinate remains crucial. In this respect, there is a main danger associated with the liberation theologies, or more correctly, with overemphasizing the societal aspect of the gender-informed inquiry, namely that by over anchoring the experience of women centred on injustice, oppression, and marginalization too deep in the social order, transcendence of the salvific act loses importance. And salvation is a major event for theology.

With socio-pragmatic approaches, selectivity of the material ranks high, precisely because of the need to supply textual references to support the political agenda of certain feminists. *Arbitrariness* points to a reversal, yet not diminishing of the roles of oppressors and oppressed by arguing in their interests, the oppressed become oppressors¹²⁶ and the very nature of the critique is not changed, only the identity of who are in charge with providing *the* exegesis of any Biblical text.

A socio-pragmatic exegesis can never claim *rightness* for its scope is too narrow, and experience is too subjective, too focused.¹²⁷

Other caution steps with the socio-critical approach are to be taken when analyzing the significance of the critical encounter between the text's socio-historical context and the reader's socio-cultural world. By the mere fact that we are embedded in contemporary realities, one could very easily fall in a Biblicist trap, if disregarding the historical character of the Biblical world to the point that it forces the latter to fit into the contemporary socio-cultural mold. Such mistake would result in a precritical, or uncritical retrodictive utilization of a contemporary cultural worldview to interpret an ancient text following the dictum: "since we know how things turned out, that information can be used as a check on the theories". A causal reading on "how things turned out" "may rest on any number of totally unpredictable factors, including chance human psychopathology, or iconoclasm; thus the present can never function as a check on earlier social dynamics."¹²⁸

Another observation resulting into the same type of precritical judgment would be pertaining to the so-called tabloid¹²⁹ readers of the Bible, who generate, authorize, favour

¹²⁶ Thiselton, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics*, 450.

¹²⁷ Thiselton, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics*, 451. I will refer again to the implications of radicalizing the contextual as definitory for a socio-pragmatic interpretation when dealing with the literary aspects of how contemporary notions of interpretation and interpreters need to be understood, as part of the influences of the literary theories on the gender-informed approach.

¹²⁸ Tolbert, *Social, Sociological and Anthropological Methods*, 2.

¹²⁹ Cf. Adam, *Faithful Interpretation. Reading the Bible in a Postmodern World*, 59-61, (ft. 4).

one interpretation over the others based on the conventions that only a group shares, which are in fact not at all be accepted in a context of academic scholarship.

Moreover, an analysis based solely on ideological discourse containing gender discrimination can only propagate the negative cultural stereotypes and thus work against the very liberating nature of feminist studies. In doing so, it grants patriarchy and androcentric tradition in relation to oppression and marginalization of women an “undisputed heritage, [...] also a certain inevitability that relieves each successive generation of its moral responsibility for the particular choices that encouraged the evolution of the pattern.”¹³⁰ In contrast, other orientations are preoccupied with understanding the context of Biblical negative or so-called misogynist stories, and thus minimize their relevance for the present context.

Related to the issue, I would like to add another observation, namely that with regard to reading gender constructions in a postmodern environment. Especially relevant when interpreting, one should bear in mind the major distinction between the contemporary constructions and the Ancient Near Eastern ones. What we gain from our hermeneutical horizon is informed by modern presuppositions. As a result, interpretation is delivered primarily for the relevant contemporary questions by the accurate decoding of ancient system of gender roles encoded in the ‘original’, historical context.

Additionally, a distance is imposed because “the information on gender divisions that can be found in the New Testament or other Graeco-Roman writings should be read as symbolic accounts and not as depictions of actual day-to-day social relations”.¹³¹

Nonetheless, I shall point in the upcoming subsection that the rhetorical power of text lies precisely in these symbolic accounts, which have a ‘realistic’ basis.

Provisional Conclusions (2)

Incursions in the sociological approaches are without doubt broadening our perspective on feminist Biblical scholarship.

As presented above, it is clear why the feminist theological approach related some of its themes and concerns to liberation theology. As Letty M. Russell formulates, from a positive view the feminist theological approach aims at the freedom of the children of God, while

¹³⁰ Tolbert, *Social, Sociological and Anthropological Methods*, 263.

¹³¹ Tolbert, *Social, Sociological and Anthropological Methods*, 269.

negatively, it diagnoses the corruption of society and Church via *sexism*, *androcentrism* and *patriarchy*.¹³²

The main distinction between the two is regarding the scope: the gender-informed perspective entails an ecumenical endeavour, as it operates at more than one level, transgressing the ethnical boundaries. It embraces women of all classes, races, and cultures, oppressed along the centuries by the patriarchy, showing radicalism and universality¹³³ in contrast with the different expressions of liberation theology, which remained anchored in the contextual.

Gender is an analytical category very important for the sociological analysis. Since it never appears in isolation but informed by 'race', 'class', 'ethnicity', 'social location', it has a political function. Given its enmeshedness in the ideological discourse of any society informed primarily in the current case by an emancipatory analysis of 'interest', gender provides thus liberation from androcentric, patriarchal structures resulting from the ideological critique.

The alienating experience of women is a crucial critical principle in examining the ideological character of the feminist approach.¹³⁴ In its experience lies the historical inscriptions of marginality and oppression conducted against women. These are matters of fact and not of opinion for the feminist writers. *Cui bono* becomes one of the key questions for the gender-related perspective, considering amendable those who wish to profit from the propagation of unjust structures as surfacing from the androcentric discourse emphases.

Having as a starting point the anchoring in the social contemporary experience, the message of the Bible is continuously reformulated, and new dimensions are always unfolding resulting in a type of approach named socio-critical, that is totally opposed to the socio-pragmatic dimension.

By evidencing its social character, the feminist approach adopts a stance requiring more than mere theorizing, respectively taking action, transforming by questioning the existing ideologies, which limit the representativeness of marginalized and/or oppressed groups, among which women enlist.

¹³² Letty M. Russell, Sprachveränderung und Kirchenreform, in: Letty M. Russell (ed.), *Als Mann und Frau ruft er runs. Von nicht-sexistischen Gebrauch der Bibel*, München: J. Pfeiffer, 1979, 80-84.

¹³³ Cf. Elizabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza, Für eine befreite und befreiende Theologie, in: *Concilium* 14/1978, 287-294, 291. One should consider however, that universality present in the present claim is an ideal of the liberal orientation pertaining to second wave feminism. Such an expression was made irrelevant by the third wave feminism, when it was acknowledged that political and social circumstances are not universal, allowing therefore for multiple contextual formulations.

¹³⁴ Thiselton, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics*, 434-435, 439.

The activism is also clear with Biblical hermeneutics, where the reconstructionist approach revolving around gender gained popularity. This gained immensely by considering the sociological and anthropological data for additional information on the role and status of women in ancient cultures.

In spite of interpreting societal patterns in terms of roles, unaltered by the temporal component that seems to substantiate the universal claim of sociological studies, one should however bear in mind that while generic roles remained the same, their understanding has been changed with the passing of time.

Subsequently, when discussing the level of congeniality between contemporary and societal generic patterns, the danger of reading back retrodictively emerges, as we project our contemporary understanding of various social roles, attitudes, values etc. into ancient categories. And this would affect the validity of any serious exegetical research.

In the same line of ideas, an overfocus on the social aspect in Biblical exegesis can be rendered reductionist, due to its speculative nature.

This fact stems from the lack of data dealing with ancient world categories¹³⁵ and so it cannot substantiate the claim for a precise historical reconstruction of the civil structures in ancient society.

Therefore, it is for this reason that I will not venture myself into a reconstructive type of exegesis with regard to Apocalypse 17.

Even more so, the association of feminist critique with liberation could not be, on second thought as auspicious as one may think for liberation theology reduces faith to politics as well as overstresses human activity in the process of liberation, and uses selectively the texts of the Bible as to accommodate their agenda.¹³⁶

Maintaining a delicate balance between a metacritical exegesis and a socio-pragmatic one while at the same time remaining truthful to analyzing ancient categories are not the only challenges when discussing the feminist approach from a sociological perspective. Selectivity, an overfocus on contextual, also understood as ethnocentrism –“the interpretation of different cultures and peoples in terms of one’s own culture and views”¹³⁷ –can be also very destabilizing factors for the feminist discourse viewed diachronically, respectively with the third wave feminism.

¹³⁵ Bray, *Biblical Interpretation: Past and Present*, 512; for a similar view cf. Tolbert, *Social, Sociological and Anthropological Methods*, 266f.

¹³⁶ Bray, *Biblical Interpretation: Past and Present*, 517f.

¹³⁷ Tolbert, *Social, Sociological and Anthropological Methods*, 264.

1.3 Approaches belonging to Literary Criticism

As it was presented in the earlier subsections, context –with social, cultural, economic, geographical etc. coordinates –becomes part of the text, creating thus a type of indivisibility bearing important repercussions on the interpretative act.

Texts *per se* are the object of hermeneutics. The etymology of the word¹³⁸ portrays the unity at the level of linguistic units, realized by applying a set of semantic and syntactic principles. It also denotes the ‘meaningful web’ attained by coherence –an inner text attribute –provided by certain motif clusters, which are repeated, opposed, referred to at the textual level.

Texts are “*sign-carriers* in a communicative process”.¹³⁹ In other words, any text can be defined as any situational communication fixed in written form.

Literary methods are not at all new with the study of Biblical texts. They offer valuable insight and depth in the exegetical study.

Bearing resemblance with the perspective offered by the historical-critical method, the text is shaped by the interplay of historical and cultural forces.

Unlike the historical-critical method, which does not take the literal text as its starting point, the literary criticism focuses on the text, as part of a web of texts, having inner coherence. The method does not consider the Biblical texts primarily as a source of information for real history, but rather deems their linguistic thesaurus, structure, and rhetorical literary artifices as crucial for the interpretation.

Additionally, in the Introduction of *The New Literary Criticism and the New Testament*, Elizabeth Struthers Malbon and Edgar V. McKnight contend that the literary criticism of the New Testament does not disregard history altogether, just that history is no longer perceived as the ‘originating case of literary texts’ but it is conceived in literary terms.¹⁴⁰

“Literary criticism has been liberating to New Testament studies by opening dimensions of meaning that were obscured by the narrowly historical approach that dominated the

¹³⁸ The word comes from the Latin *textus* or *texere*, which means “texture”, or “to weave”. As such it entails several levels of formation.

¹³⁹ Barbara Schmitz, *Prophetie und Königtum. Eine narratologisch- historische Methodologie entwickelt an den Königsbüchern*, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008, 18.

¹⁴⁰ Elizabeth Struthers Malbon, Edgar V. McKnight, Introduction, in: Elizabeth Struthers Malbon, Edgar V. McKnight (eds.), *The New Literary Criticism and The New Testament*, 15-26, 18.

discipline for so long”,¹⁴¹ since it is common accepted that text-oriented approaches revolve around the concept of meaning.

Moreover, literary approaches focus on the triad author-text-reader when dealing with any text (also Biblical!).

Biblical scholarship accepts generally that the text is the creation of an author who shapes it to reflect his or her worldview: “the author’s worldview is an amalgamation of personal insights and the views of the surrounding society [...] the literary expression of the worldview is the result of the author’s creative use of the society’s language and literary conventions [...] the reader brings to the text a personal view of the world and specific linguistic and literary conventions that are socially conditioned.”¹⁴²

Reading is thus an active process in which readers engage in a continuous negotiation followed by an expansion of their own horizons as the text’s deeper levels of meaning unfold.

I mentioned in the previous subsections how multiple factors and circumstances ranging from historical to social, as well as interest shape our understanding of a text, and also the manner in which we make sense out of it.

Subsequently, meaning no longer precedes the reading act, it is not static, trans-temporal, but rather ever-changing, depending when (temporal flow) and if (conditions) the reader engages with the text.¹⁴³ Moreover, meaning of a 1st century text was different when read in its ‘original’ context, than when read nowadays. This difference refers to setting, interest, beliefs of the readers, but also their cultural background for which certain images are relevant.

Besides the fact that reading is bound to time in creating a temporal experience, it is also dialogical by nature, in that it requests a reader.

There is an interaction between the reader and the text, in which both parts are influencing each other. The reader is actively involved with ‘producing’ meaning. In doing so, the reader introduces a more subjective, personal dimension in view of his/her experience.

This is why, when considering the historical dimension of the reading act, one should keep in mind that literary levels of the text are to be distinguished from the historical ones: while the literary ones point to the situational environment of the text redaction, the historical ones, as we have seen, prevent the fundamentalist, or Biblicist interpretation.

¹⁴¹ William A. Beardslee: What Is It About? Reference in the New Testament Literary Criticism, in: Elizabeth Struthers Malbon, Edgar V. McKnight (eds.), *The New Literary Criticism and The New Testament*, 367-386, 384.

¹⁴² Robert R. Wilson, *Sociological Approaches to the Old Testament*, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984, 4, 6.

¹⁴³ Robert M. Fowler, Figuring Mark’s Reader, in: Janice Capel Anderson and Stephen D. Moore (eds.), *Mark and Method. New Approaches in Biblical Studies* (2nd ed.), Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008, 59-95.

The reevaluation of language as objectives of literary criticism proved to be extremely insightful for Biblical exegesis as a whole.

Multiple observations on the 'nature', 'function' and 'type of language' need to be adduced.

Primarily, because the texts of the Bible are written in Hebrew and Greek, language –its nature, as well as its capacity of decoding everyday life by reflecting to a certain extent reality as such –becomes important.

There are two classical, universally acknowledged functional understanding of language with relevance for the understanding of Biblical texts.

In the first model, language has a transmissive function. It fits a communicative situation, containing an encoded message, where the readers, or receivers are engaged in decoding or translating this message. Since language has a cognitive component, and so “culturally stored knowledge”¹⁴⁴ is passed on.

Pertaining to Biblical texts, such a decoding happens when a literalist understanding of the Bible occurs, namely when “it involves the translation (or “encoding”) of an idea (the revelatory Word) into a signal (Bible) by a sender (G*d), the transmission of this signal to a receiver (Biblical readers and interpreters), and the decoding of the signal into a message (religion, dogma, history, ethics, etc.) by the receiver.”¹⁴⁵

This option argues among others for the existence of one univocal and authoritative message, which cannot be modified by any new context(s). Since nowadays such an understanding can no longer accommodate the extent to which linguistic categories have changed.

With the gradual consideration for a greater liberty of readers and a more permissive understanding of the written text, one registers a shift from this understanding toward the dialogical model, the second option noted by the theorists. According to them, language is much more than mediating the message between the sender and receiver; it “has the function of generating new meanings [...] that are created by the multiplicity and heterogeneity of Biblical voices and their “counterwords”, produced in Biblical interpretation.”¹⁴⁶

Words never communicate fully and in a perfect manner their meaning, especially when integrating in a complex depiction of an image referring to a transcendent reality, such as a

¹⁴⁴ Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action* (trans. Thomas McCarthy), vol. 2, Boston: Beacon Press, 1987, 150.

¹⁴⁵ Schüssler-Fiorenza, *Wisdom Ways*, 29, inverted commas in original.

¹⁴⁶ Schüssler-Fiorenza, *Wisdom Ways*, 29, inverted commas in original.

vision, for example. They often rely on figures of speech, be they comparisons, metaphors etc., which address the senses, in their entirety, giving a hint “at what things are *like*.”¹⁴⁷

Metaphors are found at the confluence of historical with literary criticism. Such a reason is that on the one hand, the understanding of the original and contemporary context of a text– the objective of a historical approach– informs the assumptions regarding the metaphorical nature of a textual image –something, which can be achieved only with literary tools. The rhetorical value of such an image can only be achieved by combining the two approaches.

Exploring in depth the Freudian category of suspicion, Paul Ricoeur rehabilitates the creative component of language –as the medium of revelation –especially by the use of metaphors. For him metaphor is the key concept, tensive by nature, impossible to be fully translated into words. This means of expression is very pregnant with meanings, it both discloses and conceals so when reading the focus has a twofold essence: a personal and a textual one.

The preference for this particular understanding goes as far as 1978, in *The Rule of the Metaphor*¹⁴⁸, where Ricoeur already notes a schism in the manner of appropriating a metaphor: on the one hand there is the possibility offered by a substitutionary approach, or substitution theory –in the case of Biblical exegesis, is very well represented by the historical-critical method –where a metaphor can be entirely translated in other literal terms, “without any substantial loss in meaning.”¹⁴⁹ Via metaphors, language is merely decorative and as such, a substitution for a more literal word or phrase should not pose any major problem.¹⁵⁰ Such a translation would entail the comparative particle ‘like’ either stated or unstated, by underlying the qualitative features of the translated word.

In such an approach, the word as the unit of reference *par excellence* is merely substituted for another word, respectively the same word in any preceding or following instance, without considering the context where it functions, one can merely fathom the extent to which this endeavour actually is reductionist.

On the other hand, the quintessence of a metaphor can never be fully diluted by translation, being a stance that the cognitive approach takes. Such an understanding stems from the assumptions that language is active and as such is always capable of creating new meaning. A metaphor can never be ascribed a single denotational code, but rather shows

¹⁴⁷ Fowler, *Figuring Mark's Reader*, 55.

¹⁴⁸ Paul Ricoeur, *The Rule of the Metaphor: Multi-disciplinary Studies of the Creation of Meaning in Language*, (trans. R. Czerny, K. McLaughlin, J. Costello), London: Routledge, 1978, 4.

¹⁴⁹ Max Black, Metaphor, in: *Models and Metaphors: Studies in Language and Philosophy*, New York: Cornell University Press, 1962, 25-47, 31.

¹⁵⁰ Sharon Moughtin-Mumby, *Sexual and Marital Metaphors in Hosea, Jeremiah, Isaiah and Ezekiel*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008, 3.

always plurality in its connotative sense. The moment a metaphor is translated in terms of another word, it loses its cognitive content.¹⁵¹

Metaphors are important for the Biblical studies on the one hand, because of their persuasive power in the larger acceptance of the word 'discourse' but their use is not only limited to that. Some scholars who take the stand of a more traditionalist view in doing exegesis, discard the latent potency of the metaphors, but simply reducing them to 'just a metaphor'-type-of-expression, and not allowing them to be of use for the feminist studies. These contrasting views reflect conflicting understandings of the function of metaphors as rhetorical devices.

Metaphors, more precisely gendered metaphors are very much embraced by feminist scholars because they represent "tension, dialectic, openness, change, growth and relativity."¹⁵²

Feminist critique functions in two ways: by emphasizing the poetic aspect of language, it triggers the activation of a complex web of relations residing in one's imagination. Additionally, such metaphors are actualized in contemporary contexts. As such, their function in the ancient environment where they originated needs to be examined, but also various traditions of interpretation of the metaphor, especially when contexts and meanings accepted are reflected in their contemporaneous value. "To study hidden meanings, metaphors, or symbolic structures as isolated entities makes for barren interpretations. They must be studied in their context—in the living and working experience for those to whom the symbols have meaning in the first place."¹⁵³

Often, feminists understand metaphor to simply reinstate the negative stereotypes of the patriarchal society reflected in the texts of the 1st century CE, which include views on women's sexuality: always adopting a negative interpretation of feminine imagery leads to the propagation of negative sexual connotations by the feminist themselves, which is, in essence, highly counterproductive.

Besides looking into the creative power of language, given by the use of metaphors, reevaluating language in particular for the gender-informed perspective is an important task in the depatriarchalizing any text in the theological discourse.¹⁵⁴ Feminist criticism interprets literature, including the New Testament against the dominant context of androcentrism, manifested in translations, interpretations, also interpreters and writers.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵¹ Black, Metaphor, 46 as cited in Moughtin-Mumby, *Sexual and Marital Metaphors*, 4.

¹⁵² Sallie McFague, *Metaphorical Theology: Models of God in Religious Language*, Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982, 64.

¹⁵³ Tordis Borchgrevink, Marit Melhuus, Text as Reality – Reality as Text, in: *Studia Theologica* 43/1989, 35-59, 39.

¹⁵⁴ Schüssler-Fiorenza, *Wisdom Ways*, 29.

¹⁵⁵ McKnight, A Sheep in Wolf's Clothing: An Option in Contemporary New Testament Hermeneutics, 340.

A gender-informed approach has a communal character. It must always have the interests of the community stated. That means the fact that a reading should always be performed 'against the grain' of a dominant reading, that is against a reading that universalizes to the point it is considered obvious.

Once any 'reading against the grain' occurs, its character is always provisional; it is always a starting point in any discourse. Interpreters are thus required a higher degree of participation in decoding the message and the result is not only that we are dealing with Bible as an open text, but also that the possibilities of interpretation rise proportionally with contemporary readers' activation of the cultural encyclopaedia.

The philological approach pertaining to feminist study finds further legitimation as follows: "because many of the stories of the Biblical characters are probably a mixture of history and fiction, most feminist scholars do not attempt at the reconstruction of historical persons"[...] but restrict themselves to "role and characterization of women in the Biblical text"¹⁵⁶, by "studying the stories from a literary perspective, with more or less reference to what is known of the history and culture of the period."¹⁵⁷

Additionally, gender-related imagery needs to be re-examined also in pragmatic terms, to avoid situations where imagery functions "as an optional vehicle which sets up favourable resonances for the readers",¹⁵⁸ i.e. gendered ones.

Generic imagery in the Bible viewed in 'positive' and 'negative' terms is not at all a constructive endeavour. The rationale behind this claim is the following: the textual evidence calls for the presence of the image and likeness of God in both sexes (equally!) and as a result any gender-exclusive attribution of the above mentioned qualifications would violate the very nature of the divine image.¹⁵⁹ There are scholars who opt for the revival of the concept of "gender unity", which "fits well with a religious system in which humans are the image and counterpart of God and there is only one God".¹⁶⁰

A differentiated perspective could be perceived when analyzing gendered images as 'accidents of language'. Corporeal references to gendered images of both New and Old Testament are glided over by supporters of the historical-critical method. Feminists,

¹⁵⁶ Nolan Fewell, *Reading the Bible Ideologically: Feminist Criticism*, 275.

¹⁵⁷ Alice Ogden Bellis, *Helpmates, Harlots and Heroes. Women's Stories in the Hebrew Bible* (2nd ed.), London, Louisville: John Knox Press, 2007, 24.

¹⁵⁸ Cf. Elizabeth Achtemeier, *Female Language for God: Should the Church Adopt It?* In: Donald G. Miller (ed.), *The Hermeneutical Quest: Essays in the Honor of James Luther Mays* (Princeton Theological Monograph 4), Allison Park, PA: Pickwick Press, 1986, 97-114.

¹⁵⁹ The preoccupation with recovering the paradigm of the (radical) equality between the two sexes is much more popular with feminism of the 2nd wave, cf. Thiselton, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics*, 455.

¹⁶⁰ Tikva Frymer-Kensky, *The Ideology of Gender in the Bible and the Ancient Near East*, in: eadem, *Studies in Bible and Feminist Criticism*, 185-193, 193.

especially those 'Biblicists' who take the text literally insist on their thorough analysis. The following arguments supporting the two standpoints are worth mentioning.

On the one side of the spectrum, James Barr¹⁶¹ warns of confusing Biblical gendered images (i.e. the accidents of language) with the distinctive role of men and women.

"No one would suppose that the Turks, because they nowhere distinguish gender in their language, not even in personal pronouns [...] are deficient in the concept of sexual difference; nor would we agree that the French have extended their legendary erotic interests into the linguistic realm by forcing every noun to be either masculine or feminine".¹⁶²

Texts do not have a feminist substance because they present women, or at least corporeal depictions of women, but they are so, because the language used to depict such images is deeply faulty, considering the power of the metaphors, for example. Gendered images present inscribed in the Biblical texts give away the asymmetrical gender relationships.¹⁶³

Asserting a correct/wrong value to readings has been performed according to the dictum: "Readings that are idiosyncratic to the point of neglecting other readings are probably wrong."¹⁶⁴

However, I hope that so far I have successfully shown that Biblical texts are basically rhetorical texts, having rhetorical power supported by the metaphorical force of language. Antoinette Clark Wire writes that "in classical times, language was understood as a form of power to affect behaviour."¹⁶⁵

Without social anchoring, ancient texts would not speak in any way to contemporary audiences. In particular, rhetorical images such as that of the Great Whore were written to accommodate particular historical struggles pertaining to concrete particular situations, bearing gender as inscribed in the religious discourse.

The sophistication we encounter when presenting the characteristics of literary categories pertaining to Biblical texts was developed over a historical span contained in the literary criticism. This marks several turning points, deemed valuable for their reverberations in the field of Biblical studies. Traditionally, the process started with an emphasis on the *author* of a literary work.

¹⁶¹ Thiselton, *Hermeneutics*, 292.

¹⁶² James Barr, *The Semantics of Biblical Language*, London: Oxford University Press, 1961, 39, as quoted in Thiselton, *Hermeneutics*, 292-293.

¹⁶³ Thiselton, *Hermeneutics*, 285.

¹⁶⁴ Barr, Conclusion. Choosing Between Readings: Questions and Criteria, 171.

¹⁶⁵ Antoinette Clark Wire, Since God is One: Rhetoric as Theology and History in Paul's Romans, in: Elizabeth Struthers Malbon, Edgar V. McKnight (eds.), *The New Literary Criticism and The New Testament*, 210-227, 210.

The *author's* social and cultural enmeshment was considered enough for grasping the meaning of a text. Therefore, interpretation would presuppose the accurate decoding the auctorial intention inscribed in a text.

However, with the developments in literary theories is always important to differentiate between the diverse literary orientations regarding the author.¹⁶⁶ The palette available allows us to move from the author as the *originator or writer of the text*, to the author as a *textual intention*. The former option is usually as unproblematic as it is unproductive for the interpretation, whereas the latter is always a construction of the reader, respectively interpreters, being as such much more plausible.

A move forward in the history of literary criticism with relevance to Biblical exegesis in particular advanced the idea that the text would supersede its author¹⁶⁷ in terms of meaning. A new *openness* of the text was inaugurated with the instatement of a new literary movement called New Criticism that was a reaction to the emphasis on the author of the previous era.

Initiated in the late 1930's going into the 1940's,¹⁶⁸ the movement became a point of interest for New Testament studies from the 1970's onwards.¹⁶⁹

Subsequently, the object of study changed from author to *text*, understood as a fabric woven from written signs, open and interpretable, nonetheless a coherent whole.

This brought about a positive as well as negative view: on the bright side, new understandings on the Biblical narratives were issued. Also the concept of 'point of view' was introduced and explored. On the less bright side, with the autonomy of the text, the *literary* character of Biblical writings was given priority in interpretation.

While the literary character of Bible is amply acknowledged and the literary approaches do not stand in opposition with the Biblical texts, however, with the latter the faith character overrides the literary.¹⁷⁰

As a result, the latter became an autonomous identity and was interpreted against its literary background, rather than historical one. A text-immanent reading was employed comprising "a close and detailed analysis of the text itself to arrive at an interpretation

¹⁶⁶ Beardslee, *What Is It About?*, 36.

¹⁶⁷ Cf. Roland Barthes, *Death of the Author*, in: idem, *Image, Music, Text*. Essays Selected and Translated by Stephen Heath, London: Fontana Press, 1977, 142-148.

¹⁶⁸ Thiselton, *Hermeneutics. An Introduction*, 2.

¹⁶⁹ Thiselton, *Hermeneutics. An Introduction*, 25.

¹⁷⁰ Thiselton, *Hermeneutics. An Introduction*, 26.

without referring to historical, authorial or cultural concerns”¹⁷¹, since historical data, external to texts deter the attempt of a better understanding, because text is not reality.¹⁷² The text’s autonomy was seriously challenged by deconstruction as well intertextuality,¹⁷³ as belonging to textual theories. Intertextuality reevaluates the validity of the external sources.

By their dialogical nature ‘[texts] recall to memory other texts, remind of what has already been read or experienced. No text is isolated; each and every text searches its place in an already given world of texts’.¹⁷⁴

From the above quotation, the two dimensions of intertextuality unfold: on the one hand, intertextuality is understood in a Kristeva-esque fashion,¹⁷⁵ that is evidentiating connections with other texts, on the other hand, since writing and reading are not only literary acts, they are also bear a social character by the fact of been entrenched in experience. As such, readers and interpreters, as well as authors are defined by the many aspects of their social existence evident in their interpretations. There is, subsequently, an interdependence of readers and writers’ social contexts, evident in the many layers of text production and interpretation. Moreover, it provides the theoretical framework for a critical encounter between the socio-historical context of the Biblical text and the contemporary socio-cultural context of the reader.

From the above observation, one can state that meaning depends on context. Emphasizing the inter- as well as intra-textual connections of text with other texts in its immediate textual proximity cannot but benefit the reader. Also, reading without the context stemming from the experience of the reader can turn out to be detrimental and can possibly result into multiple deviations.

Furthermore, it is not only intertextuality which challenged the text’s autonomy, but also the hermeneutical approach added the interpreter to the textual concerns, thus surpassing the reductionist result provided solely by appealing to linguistic theories, breaching into an

¹⁷¹ Charles E. Bressler, *Literary Criticism: An Introduction to theory and Practice*, (3rd ed.) New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 2003, 263.

¹⁷² Fatum, *Women, Symbolic Universe and Structures of Silence*, 64.

¹⁷³ Struthers Malbon, McKnight, *Introduction*, 23.

¹⁷⁴ Tobias Nicklas, *Leitfragen leserorientierter Exegese. Methodische Gedanken zu einer ‚Biblischen Auslegung‘*, in: Egbert Ballhorn, Georg Steins (eds.), *Der Bibelkanon in der Bibelauslegung. Methodenreflexionen und Beispielexegesen*, Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2007, 45-62, here 47 citing U. Bail, *Gegen das Schweigen klagen. Eine intertextuelle Studie zu den Klagepsalmen Ps 6 und Ps 55 und der Erzählung von der Vergewaltigung Tamars*, Gütersloh: Kaiser, 1998, 100 (translation mine).

¹⁷⁵ The term stems from Julia Kristeva, who defines it who the following way: ‘every text is constructed as a mosaïque of citations, every text is absorption and transformation of another text’. (Julia Kristeva, *Semiotiké. Recherches pour une sémanalyse*, Paris: Seuil 1978, 85: “tout texte se construit comme une mosaïque de citations, tout texte est absorbtion et transformation d’une autre texte”, translation mine).

openness of the text unimagined before. Readers are not mere textual consumers, who “passively ingest the text, either well or poorly”, since texts set important “connections to their authors, their readers, and the cultural matrix out of which they come”.¹⁷⁶

The newer theories of the literary criticism –starting with the 1970’s –place the *reader* on the foreground, with the so-called *reader-response theories*, also because the previously described approach, too much focused on the text’s autonomy, failed to provide ‘the anchorage in the public world, or reality’.¹⁷⁷

These theories correspond to the shift of emphasis from modernity, having epistemology as its object of inquiry, to postmodernity, when the focus of analysis gains more existential ontological undertones.

Subsequently, it is generally considered and proven in the earlier subsections that readers’ responses are shaped by the text as well as by the external factors to which the reader has access to, all informed his/her culture.

With this, another category was brought about into the discussion, namely *interpretation*, in which readers actively partake. For the interpretation, a series of competences are required from the readers, as mentioned above. The prerequisites for the process of reading fall within a system of knowledge comprising one’s linguistic competences in the vocabulary and the grammatical rules in which the text was written, an encyclopedia of cultural knowledge and commonly accepted conventions, as well as the history of previous interpretations of other texts.

To put it differently, even prior to reading any text, the reader brings about a certain pre-understanding/knowledge based on and profoundly conditioned by experience, contouring his expectation horizon, which while reading has it modified, confirmed, corrected even reconstructed, or the other way around infirmed. The prefix *pre-* refers by no means to an end result, for such an attitude creates a false interpretation.

All these modifications bear significance for the construction of meaning.¹⁷⁸

For the reasons presented above, interpretation is not unique, nor atemporal, but highly dependent on the readers’ contextual luggage.¹⁷⁹ Each reader brings something different to this text: different backgrounds, experience, education, exposure to theories of communication, motives, motivation, and so on. Since texts are directed to wide

¹⁷⁶ Tolbert, *Reading Bible with Authority*, 152.

¹⁷⁷ Thiselton, *Hermeneutics*, 29.

¹⁷⁸ Johannes Taschner, *Kanonische Bibelauslegung –Spiel ohne Grenzen?* In: Egbert Ballhorn, Georg Steins (eds.) *Der Bibelkanon in der Bibleauslegung. Methodenreflexionen und Beispielsexegesen*, Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 2007, 31-45, 35.

¹⁷⁹ Eco names it encyclopedia. It can refer to the linguistic competences of the reader as well as their epistemological ones. Cf. Umberto Eco, *Interpretation and Overinterpretation*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992.

audiences, and to the greatest number of readers possible, these inevitable differences in background, culture, and knowledge will lead to a number of different “readings” of this text even though the actual words and sentences remain the same for all readers.

This variety is the very nature of the reading experience: “When a text is produced not for a single addressee but for a community of readers –the author knows that he or she will be interpreted not according to his or her intentions but according to a complex strategy of interactions which also involve the readers, along with their competence in language as a “social treasury”¹⁸⁰ –not only a given language as a set of grammatical rules, but also the whole encyclopedia that the performances of that language have implemented, namely the cultural conventions that that language has produced and the very history of the previous interpretations of many texts, comprehending the text that the reader is in the course of reading.”¹⁸¹

Such an observation legitimates once again, the claim that no one approaches the text without biases and completely uninterested: “nobody reads a text without bringing his/her own presumptions and presuppositions into it.”¹⁸²

To round up the above discussion, the readers’ cooperation is what makes the reader’s oriented approach. Their involvement with and in the text occurs at different levels because ‘the more complex the structure of a text is, the more numerous are the possibilities to include various aspects in covering the gaps of the text, the so-called open spaces, which the text refers to beyond it’.¹⁸³

This process reveals the fact that texts display polysemy. As a consequence, their interpretation is polyvocal, as “signifying chain produces texts which carry with them the recollection of the intertextuality which nourishes them”.¹⁸⁴

intertextuality is extremely important due to the fact that the text has referential potentialities, which can be text-immanent, or located within the text, as well as references to an outside reality. It is the reader who actualizes these connections making them possible.¹⁸⁵

The responses of readers to texts vary considerably from moderate ones, to radical ones.

¹⁸⁰ Eco, *Interpretation and Overinterpretation*, 67.

¹⁸¹ Eco, *Interpretation and Overinterpretation*, 67-68.

¹⁸² Inger Ljung, *Silence or Suppression: Attitudes toward Women in the Old Testament*, Stockholm: Uppsala University, 1989, 98.

¹⁸³ Nicklas, *Leitfragen leseorientierter Exegese*, 47.

¹⁸⁴ Umberto Eco, *Semiotics and the Philosophy of Language*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984, 24.

¹⁸⁵ Cf. Willem S. Vorster, *The Reader in the Text: Narrative Material*, in: *Semeia* 48/1989, 21-41, 29.

The moderate ones represent a continuation to the New Criticism, where the meaning of a text, as well as its formation by readers, is situated in a tensive relationship, of mutual dependence.

With moderate representatives, the structure of a text already contains the form of an 'ideal reader'¹⁸⁶, also known as 'implied reader'¹⁸⁷ with Wolfgang Iser, or 'model reader'¹⁸⁸ with Umberto Eco.¹⁸⁹

In other words, according to Wolfgang Iser, Umberto Eco, Hans-Robert Jauss texts have an openness (open-endedness¹⁹⁰) or indeterminacy, where the readers' preoccupation of creatively "filling"¹⁹¹ in the gaps is crucial.

*"We look forward, we look back, we decide, we change our decisions, we form expectations, we are shocked by their nonfulfillment, we question, we muse, we accept, we reject; this is the dynamic process of creation."*¹⁹²

That means that readers are actively involved or engaged with texts, as they 'always bring something of their own to the text'.¹⁹³ By this actualization, meaning is being produced, as during the reading process, the readers move within the text and outside it in an attempt to interconnect the textual and extra-textual realities.

Their actions, respectively, by pointing to a wide array of possibilities and reading strategies, have also a rhetorical function, by the fact that readers engaged in negotiating meaning, find themselves affectively involved.

However, although one would be tempted to accept the existence of a literary construction, such as that of 'ideal reader', mastering the adequate technique of meaning-making, likewise well acquainted with the text's history of reading, in reality, no flesh-and-

¹⁸⁶ Iser, *The Implied Reader*, 1974.

¹⁸⁷ Wolfgang Iser, *The Implied Reader: Patterns of Communication in Prose Fiction from Bunyan to Beckett*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974; idem, *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978.

¹⁸⁸ Cf. Umberto Eco, *The Role of the Reader: Explorations in the Semiotics of Texts*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984.

The Model Reader is defined as "a textually established set of felicity conditions [...] to be met in order to have a macro-speech act (such as a text is) fully actualized." (Eco, *The Role of the Reader*, 11).

¹⁸⁹ For a list of other denominations of the instance of 'reader', cf Silvia Pellegrini, *Elija –Wegbereiter des Gottessohnes. Eine Textsemiotische Untersuchung im Markusevangelium* (Herders Biblische Studien, Band 26), Freiburg: Herder, 2000, 49-50.

¹⁹⁰ Umberto Eco, *The Open Work*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989.

¹⁹¹ Cf. Iser, *The Act of Reading*, 161-172.

¹⁹² Wolfgang Iser, The Reading Process: A Phenomenological Approach, in: *New Literary History*, 3(2)/1972, 279-299, 293.

¹⁹³ Thiselton, *Hermeneutics*, 30.

blood reader can ever achieve this status. The need for the history of readings is indispensable if one attempts to make the maximum sense of what they are reading.¹⁹⁴

On the other side of the spectrum, “the reader’s response is not *to* the meaning; it *is* the meaning.”¹⁹⁵ Therefore, this viewpoint shows the readers to be in full control of meaning production.

The author is excluded from the reading process to the extent to which his/ her intentions, as well as situation are considered relevant for the meaning production of a text. Here the type and extent of the readers/interpreters’ pre-understanding plays a decisive role in the countouring of the outcome of reading, this is why such presuppositions are not only of an epistemological nature, but also of an affective one: the so-called ‘affective reading’ is achieved by the reader’s involvement with the text.

This understanding tends towards a more poignant self-projection of the reader into the text, crystalized more clearly with Norman Holland¹⁹⁶, something that “Ricoeur rightly associates with self-centered narcissism and idolatry”.¹⁹⁷

While some theories have the individual reader as the object of analysis, some others mention ‘interpretive communities’¹⁹⁸ to be authoritative in the negotiation of meaning and interpretation. The social valence of interpretive communities has been discussed in the previous subsection and will not be repeated here.

In following, the social component accompanies the interpretive communities. As a result, one could also conclude that there are no absolutes and the text is subjective.

However, I have explicated on multiple occasions so far in this analysis, that for the current study, subjectivity is not the critical option I favour, but rather intersubjectivity.

The notion is of importance, for the reader’s interpretation never completely drifts on a pure subjective fashion –as some of the postmodern literary theories show –but rather is balanced by the view on history pertaining to the historical-critical method, which situates the interpreter in a line of tradition with a series of interpretations. Therefore, intersubjectivity allows for reading of others to be compared and contrasted. Readers have a set of presuppositions, which they bring when reading a text and such an acknowledgement represents the major contribution of the reader’s response approach in

¹⁹⁴ Fowler, *Figuring Mark’s Reader*, 58.

¹⁹⁵ Stanley Fish, Introduction, or How I Stopped Worrying and Learned to Love Interpretation, in: Stanley Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980, 1-17, 3.

¹⁹⁶ Norman Holland, *Five Readers Reading*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975.

¹⁹⁷ Thiselton, *Hermeneutics*, 31.

¹⁹⁸ Cf. Stanley Fish, *Is there a Text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980.

the NT hermeneutics: not only authors and texts are historically and socially contextualized, but also readers.

Feminist reader-response criticism takes not only the reader as analytical category, but primarily the gendered reader, as existing in reality we experience daily.

Secondly, this type does not exist in isolation, but manifests as representative of a location, social class, ethnicity, race as well as other categories.¹⁹⁹

Women are considered on the whole an interpretive community organized on generic grounds and are fully functional at the level of society, reflecting merely the fact that we are “members of an eclectic pastel of communities”.²⁰⁰ Such an interest is deemed important as it purportedly influences interpretation and manifests in actuality with the different contextual orientations in the feminist discourse –e.g. womanist²⁰¹, *mujerista*²⁰², Asian feminists etc. –informed by the above mentioned categories.

Although I consider the existence of interpretive communities to be fully accurate, however, when it comes to their authority for the gender-related approach, I remain truthful to the general statement formulated generally above: these communities inform our reading perspectives, not dictate them, therefore authority does not lie with them. It lies both within the communities of readers, as well as in multitude of interpretations along the centuries, incorporated in the corpus of tradition conserving the teaching of the Roman-Catholic Church. As such, interpretations are permeated by the Holy Spirit and authorized by God.

However, feminist criticism employs critical attitude which applies hermeneutics suspicion to the writings authorized by God. For the feminist criticism, hermeneutics of suspicion as method of reading against the grain has always a liberative result.

The strategy of reading a text with suspicion is a critical one, opposed to that of “seduction” by a text,²⁰³ when suspending disbelief while reading, for the purpose of story enjoyment is desired. Reading with suspicion means to critically assess the information the

¹⁹⁹ Janice Capel Anderson, *Reading Tabitha: A Feminist Reception History* in: Elizabeth Struthers Malbon, Edgar V. McKnight (eds.), *The New Literary Criticism and The New Testament*, 108-144, 109.

²⁰⁰ Adam, *This is My Story, This is My Song*, 227.

²⁰¹ The term belongs to the feminist theologian of African descent, Alice Walker, as formulated in: *In Search of Our Mother's Gardens*, New York/London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1983, and entered into the feminist discourse due to Kate G. Cannon, *Women and the Soul of the Black Community*, New York: Concilium, 1985 denoting the feminist discourse revolving around the Christian black folk tradition.

²⁰² Ada Maria Isasi-Diaz coined the term to describe women with Hispanic heritage's engagement with feminist theology in her book *Hispanic Women: Prophetic Voice in the Church*, San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988.

²⁰³ Paul Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, (trans. Kathleen Blamey), Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992, 159, (n.23).

text provides, to ask questions, look for ideological statements and possibly create conflicts. It becomes therefore more difficult to enjoy the enchantment provided by the “other world”.²⁰⁴

However, by such observation I am not trying to assert that readers of Biblical writings are to be disconsidered, in the manner of fictional texts, which are read, if not for the joy of it, but for comfort, confirmation and security for indeed Bible can be read through those glasses.

As a result, not only that such sensitivity to reading and interpreting unmasks the interests and tensions of an interpretive community by referring to the liberative and/or oppressive character of the Biblical texts, but also, depending on the above mentioned character, a dual hermeneutic is necessary. On the one hand, a hermeneutic of suspicion, which, in this case, is a negative hermeneutic, disclosing the patriarchal ideology and on the other hand, a positive hermeneutic, one of re-vision,²⁰⁵ which is not necessarily a of a reconstructive type. It is also conceivable as hermeneutics of trust, tantamounting to having confidence in the plurivocal language of the Bible containing authentic messages from God, whose potency needs to be continuously discovered as interpreters allow the Holy Spirit to work in them.

Because Bible is the word of God, it must be approached in the light of faith.

Doubting and believing interact creatively. Hermeneutics promotes engagement with the text in order to retrieve meaning that provides and sustains faith.

Reason and intellect do not separate from faith in God. *Credo ut intelligam* promotes a belief in tolerance and respect, for it has transformative power.

Exegesis is, as a result, not only preoccupied with unmasking androcentrism in Biblical texts by interrogating values and cultural paradigms, but also aids in diversifying models of thought and concepts such as *identity* and *interpretation*, by offering alternative paths.

However, hermeneutics of trust is not to be equated with blind faith, nor does it result in the alienation from believing communities. It is meant to improve our lives and deepen our religious convictions. It employs deconstruction purposefully.

This awareness and self-consciousness in the act of reading becomes more personal and requires an active engagement on the behalf of the reader, who acknowledges his/her personal biases and possibly resists²⁰⁶ the accepted readings.

²⁰⁴ Jacobs, *The Work of Daphne Hampson*, 232.

²⁰⁵ Anderson, *Reading Tabitha*, 110 cf. Elizabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza, *But She Said: Feminist Practices of Biblical Interpretation*, Boston: Beacon Press, 1992, 52-55.

²⁰⁶ Gendered readers in particular need to resist *immasculation*. For the concept cf. Judith Fetterley, *The Resisting Reader: A Feminist Approach to American Fiction*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1978.

By the metaphor of the 'resisting reader', Fetterley understands the reading practiced as a result of the struggle against both misogyny and a struggle for justice, dignity, or a new relevance for traditions.²⁰⁷

"Immasculation is the process of a woman reading and identifying as male when reading an androcentric and patriarchal text[...]",²⁰⁸ or otherwise defined as the practice, by which women are urged not only to read as a man, but as a certain kind of man.²⁰⁹

My evaluation of immasculation is that it should not assume a radical stance. In contrast to Weems, I would consent to the fact that women are not urged, but rather offered an option when reading to understand better the text containing certain derogatory gendered images.

Furthermore, the problem of immasculation in the feminist reader-response approach can be appropriated by applying the rhetorical approach. Between the two contrasting positions of the text controlling the readers (Iser) and the readers controlling the texts (Fish), a woman reader's awareness of language as a rhetorical tool soothes the conflict, for with rhetorical criticism, they "focus not just on what the text says, but also how it say it".²¹⁰

This approach also considers the classical tropes employed in literary rhetoric, namely metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche and irony²¹¹ and underlines how these contribute to the contouring of the ideological character of Biblical texts.

An introverted approach of this kind on the text entails several steps.²¹² From identifying the subtexts of any Biblical text, primarily establishing the limits of interpretations materialized in the rhetorical nature of language, along with the voices of an 'implied' author, one moves into the referential character of the narrative. The latter approach configures the comparative frame of the text with other text(s), very much relevant for the social and cultural web that is placing the text into a larger context. The main premise of

²⁰⁷ Fowler, *Figuring Mark's Reader*, 74-75.

Cf. Fetterley, *The Resisting Reader*, xxii: "the feminist critic must become a resisting rather than assenting reader and, by this refusal to assent, to begin the process of exorcising the male mind that has been implanted in us."

²⁰⁸ Anderson, *Reading Tabitha*, 109.

²⁰⁹ Renita J. Weems, *Reading Her Way through the Struggle: African American Women and the Bible*, in: Cain Hope Felder (ed.) *Stony the Rod We Trod: African American Biblical Interpretation*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991, 57-80, 67, cf. Anderson, *Reading Tabitha*, 109.

²¹⁰ Cf. Scobie, *The Ways of Our God*, 36.

²¹¹ Robbins, *Socio-Rhetorical Criticism*, 165.

²¹² These are theoretically described and practically applied to a reading of the Magnificat in Robbins, *Socio-Rhetorical Criticism*, 171-199.

this is recurring *topoi* of culture and societies are found in a tensive relationship with the religious community in the New Testament writings.

The rhetorical analysis of any Biblical texts rests on the fact that any written discourse serves an ideological purpose. The Biblical texts reflect a certain perspective, sometimes antagonist with contemporary realities, sporting in this case hortatory purposes, or reconciliatory ones most often by enacting reversals.

I do not wish to disregard the social aspect in the rhetorical. As a result, this optics applied to exegesis marks a change of attention onto the text defined as “social, cultural, historical, theological and ideological discourse”.²¹³ Even if it is true that “texts, all by themselves don’t read, preach, teach, enlighten, indoctrinate, brainwash, incite, provoke, reform, inspire or repress [...] do not function as agents, *compelling* people to kill, discriminate, oppress, rape, nurture, clothe, embrace, build up or create anew” it is people, who “interpret texts as justifications for these actions, according to their ideological contexts and practices”.²¹⁴

Provisional Conclusions (3)

A consideration for the various approaches provided by literary theory present Biblical texts in general with the possibility to opt for “an inclusive reading, accounting for the rich diversity of any literary text.”²¹⁵

The postmodern hermeneutical theories stand in opposition with scientific positivism propagated before. They feature as necessary tools in order to develop certain rules of interpreting texts from distant past.

Applying them can be very enlightening. Looking into the structure of any Biblical text, by exploring plots, subplots, characters, point(s) of view, comparing and contrasting it with other texts, in an attempt to understand better the message, can give the text new dimensions, new depths.

Meaning became a very flexible concept, depending on the one hand on the actualization of text in the reading process, as well as on the means of expression contained in the language as carrier of metaphors, that produce a rhetorical effect on the successive generations of readers.

²¹³ Robbins, *Socio-Rhetorical Criticism* 164.

²¹⁴ Adam, *This is My Story, This is My Song*, 221 (italics hers).

²¹⁵ Barr, *Conclusion. Choosing Between Readings: Questions and Criteria*, 171.

Moreover, the introspective focus to the text triggered the addition of the categories of readers and audience and as a result, the openness of the text was followed by novelty in terms of their readers and interpreters.

So far, every exegetical analysis I encountered employs to a certain extent the concept of *context*. Within the scope of the current dissertation, the term 'context' has a double orientation including the 'world' of the text and readers and the 'world' of the interpretations of a text and readers.

Especially relevant for the gender-informed analysis, context bears relevance from a literary perspective, as well it operates with socio-historical data, contemporary to Apocalypse.

Moreover, present postmodern context is also important for the reception of the text, being in this case, deeply informed by socio-historical and generic factors.

References pertaining to delineating the context of the emergence of Apocalypse as a literary-theological genre were already explored. So was the postmodern context of interpretation, in which the feminist approach is embedded.

By taking the postmodern theory, which focuses on the readers' responses, reading as well as interpretation gains a more subjective emphasis. With reader-response criticism, the question addressed is *who* determines the meaning, the answer being: the reader. The category of the reader is immediately informed by other coordinates, which turned into questions may sound as: when, where, why and how does the reader read?²¹⁶

Readers' responses fasten the readers' self-awareness in the reading process. This dimension is provided by the anchoring in the experience of the readers, as such triggers the update, as well as adaptation the salvific message of Bible to the new contemporary circumstances.

The gendered reader is the chief-category of feminist criticism revolving around the responses of readers, which are not optional. Here the strategy of approaching any Biblical text is a reading *against the grain*²¹⁷, the actual realization of a hermeneutics of suspicion aimed at resisting the immasculation, which certain texts may disguise.

As we become more aware of the ideological character of texts, we explore the generic category of gender.

Such a stance can lead to a conflictual dynamic between possible readings.

²¹⁶ Fowler, *Figuring Mark's Reader*, 52.

²¹⁷ By this recurrent idea, I mean „with a certain perspective, which was not the perspective at the time of the writing of the text“.

The rhetorical feature of the text's language softens the radicalism of immasculation, by offering an alternative understanding to the gendered metaphors as the process of updating the Biblical message unfolds.

However, the danger of applying a literary approach solely, is to reduce the Word of God to the written text, as the full of object of study, without taking into account its theological character. One should remember that the message of the Bible is first and foremost theological, and not literary. Even for a gender-informed approach the importance of maintaining the theological character in the interpretation is not to be overlooked.

Hinted at several times by now, especially in relation to the sociological perspective influencing the Biblical stories, the other danger is that only applying the reader's response especially in a socio-pragmatic vein, the interpretation can become too personal and subjective, by emphasizing the baggage every reader brings when reading a text, ranging from their own past, experience, associations etc. Although justified for their particular case, such an interpretation cannot however claim validity, nor authority considering the over-subjective narrow character of interpretation. In this case, pre-understanding is actually not changeable, it is there prior and post reading, unchanged. In this manner, an adequate historical research may correct the blur created by an overemphasis of the literary studies.

Furthermore, the issue of the contextuality is an important parameter with the feminist critical method. As McKnight rightly observes "a challenge for the feminist critics is to operate in their local context but to see that context as embracing more than the local."²¹⁸

²¹⁸ McKnight, *A Sheep in Wolf's Clothing: An option in Contemporary New Testament Hermeneutics*, 344.

1.4 Feminist Contribution to understanding of the above mentioned Perspectives

Feminist Biblical interpretation uses the scaffolding provided by the feminist theory as a frame of reference for its legitimation. Since there is an abundance of feminist theoretical perspectives, they lie on various generic assumptions and materialize in a rich catalogue of readings. As such, a differentiation among them is for the purpose of this study not only welcome, but also necessary.

The gendered-informed perspective entails a social engagement with a critique oriented towards patriarchy, androcentrism “since feminist studies, in distinction to gender studies, are explicitly committed to the struggle for changing kyriarchal structures of oppression in religious, cultural, and societal institutions, they must disentangle the ideological (religious-theological) functions of the Biblical texts for inculcating and legitimating relations of domination.”²¹⁹

However, to be engaged in the critique of androcentrism and patriarchy is to accept primarily that the Bible is an authoritative text. Any subsequent gender-related analysis develops only from this starting point.

The roots of feminist contribution are traced back to the acknowledgement of women’s “full humanness and their freedom for self-definition, self-determination, self-respect, self-esteem and self-affirmation”,²²⁰ to what Schüssler-Fiorenza names ‘feminist consciousness’.

The basis for such this awareness can be traced, on the one hand, in the European Enlightenment, and on the other hand, to the mid-19th century North American women’s suffrage movement, materialized into what is known as first wave feminism.²²¹

The gender-informed interest in theology, especially in Biblical theology is as old as the movement itself. Since the Bible is undisputedly the basis for the transmitted Christian faith, there is however, an ambivalence regarding the way it is approached. It is normative for the religious practice and teaching, so interpretations maintain its authority and salvage the problematic interpretations of certain texts.

Moreover, the interest in exegesis is great, especially because, along the centuries of interpretation and actualization of the divine message some theologians have been using

²¹⁹ Schüssler-Fiorenza, *Wisdom Ways*, 97.

²²⁰ Schüssler-Fiorenza, *Wisdom Ways*, 93

²²¹ Anne M. Clifford, *Introducing Feminist Theology*, New York: Orbis Books, 2001, 268.

the Bible to oppress and discriminate against women. In this framework, the Bible itself was perceived as a “document of patriarchy”.²²² This expression emerged and became popular with the advent of the first wave feminism, which marks the dawn of the feminist movement, as we know it.

Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Matilda Joslyn Gage were promoters of this ideology and used the Bible as divine authority to denounce the oppressive structures, which prevented women from attaining the social status of full humanity.

This movement became very popular in the 20th century with some theologians occasionally “shattering the foundations of the religious belief”²²³ just as Matilda Joslyn Gage prophesied.

Second wave feminism is closely associated with Euro-American women’s advocacy for equal rights. It occurs in conjunction with another political endeavour, namely the Civil Rights’ Movement of the 60’s and early 70’s. This movement was primarily aiming at exposing the psychological effects of power through the authority of the consciousness raising.

The premises for such a development included increased access to education for women, leading to raising awareness on the connection between the social, economic and political oppression, as well as regarding the realization of the fact that traditional religious expressions deeply devalued women.²²⁴

It was then when feminist theologians’ assumptions became more professional by their nature and envisioned that “once the Bible would be stripped of androcentric and misogynist interpretations, its real meaning would support women’s claims to equality,”²²⁵ leading eventually to supporting an active engagement in regional church structures.

Despite the fact that subsequent interpretations of Biblical texts were considered at least disfavoured for women, the text itself was triggered this attitude. As a result, a conflict emerged between among the feminist scholars with regard to the authority of the Bible, a text, which carried the scars of the oppression and marginalization of women. So it effaced a tension between remaining ‘objective’ in textual exegesis and being committed to feminism, advocating social change.²²⁶

Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza voiced the above-mentioned tension in the following:

²²² Marie-Theres Wacker, *Feminist Criticism or Feminist Criticism?*, 636.

²²³ Matilda Joslyn Gage, *Women, Church and State: A Historical Account of the Status of Woman through the Christian ages. With Reminiscences of the Matriarchate*, Reprint, Watertown: Persephone Press, 1980, 544, also available online at <http://www.sacred-texts.com/wmn/wcs/wcs00.htm> (retrieved 12 Jan 2012).

²²⁴ Harrison, *Modern Women*, 146.

²²⁵ Ogden Bellis, *Feminist Biblical Scholarship*, 25-26.

²²⁶ Adela Yarbro Collins, *Feminist Perspectives on Biblical Scholarship*, Chico: Scholars Press, 1985, 3-5.

*“Does a conflict exist between being a wo/man and being a Christian? Is this a basic contradiction that can only be overcome if one of these poles of identity is relinquished for the sake of the other? Or is it possible that both poles –being a Christian and being a feminist –can be kept in fruitful tension, so that my being a Christian supports my liberation struggle, and, conversely, my being a feminist supports my Christian engagement for the realization of justice and love.”*²²⁷

The second wave constituted the next step in the movement: social transformation was taken in women’s hands and the Bible became an instrument in the liberation process, which is a totally different perspective from the previous era.

With third wave feminism we encounter a broadening of the scope, or refining the existing categories of the feminist perspectives. It was no longer primarily associated with middle and upper class women of either European or American descent, but turned its focus to ‘third world’ countries. Therefore, feminist movement of the third wave is mainly concerned with voicing the different social, ethnical and cultural contexts of women’s experience, which was subsequently shaped into *womanist* theology, *mujerista* theology starting with the 1980’s.²²⁸

Moreover, the engagement with feminist theology spread outside Christianity, as other monotheist religions such as Muslim and Jewish feminist theologians, or non-theist religions (like Buddhism) contributed to core writings of the gender-informed discourse.²²⁹ The interest covered Biblical studies, epistemological theological questions, relationship to Church structures, spirituality as well as ecology.

Such variety evidenced by the above presentation brought an impending need to classify the different stances of involvement with feminist theology.

Many options were provided, ones elaborated by Caroline Osiek²³⁰ on the proposal advanced among other by Rosemary Radford Ruether and Katharine Sakenfeld. In her article, Osiek claims the evidence for five types of feminist criticism (rejectionist, loyalist, revisionist, sublimationist and liberationist). More recently, Elizabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza,²³¹

²²⁷ Schüssler-Fiorenza, Transforming the Legacy of *The Woman’s Bible*, 11.

²²⁸ Clifford, *Introducing Feminist Theology*, 272-273.

²²⁹ For a list of names and contributors, cf Elizabeth A. Castelli, Heteroglossia, Hermeneutics and History. A Review Essay of Recent Feminist Studies of Early Christianity, in: *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*, 10(2)/1994, 73-98.

²³⁰ Osiek, The Feminist and the Bible b, 93-106, reprinted by Claudia V. Camp, Feminist Theological Hermeneutics: Canon and Christian Identity, in: Elizabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza (ed.), *Searching the Scriptures*, New York, NY: Crossroad, 1993, 154-171, 157. Camp credits Carolyn Osiek with developing this five-part typology for understanding feminist theological hermeneutics.

²³¹ Cf. Schüssler-Fiorenza, *But She Said*, 20-50.

Anthony C. Thiselton²³² and Anne Clifford²³³ remained more or less faithful to Osiek's terminology.

However, for the sake of simplicity, I shall briefly consider and limit the major orientations within the feminist group to three, respectively *revolutionary* feminism, *reformist* feminism and *reconstructionist* feminism.²³⁴

Revolutionary feminist theologians are proponents of an engagement with theology resulting from their personal disheartenment with Christianity. It cannot offer a remedial framework for the development of the feminist critique since is too corrupted by patriarchy and as a result too oppressive. They call themselves *post-feminists*, or *non-Christian feminists*. Mary Daly and Daphne Hampson acts as promoters of this vision.²³⁵ They urge women to an abandonment of Christianity.²³⁶

Reformist feminist theologians are more lax in their claims. Therefore, they seek modest changes within the structures of existing Churches, while remaining committed to the Christian tradition. Among the means of employing their standpoint, one would enlist solving the problems of women's secondary status advancing measures such as inclusive translations of the Bible and laying more emphasis on egalitarian passages in the Bible, as well a greater involvement of women in church-related ministries.²³⁷

Osiek locates this particular form of feminist engagement under the rubric of a loyalist hermeneutics,²³⁸ which "[...] stretch[es] history and the literal meaning of texts, and it tends to be innocent of the political implications of the types of social interaction and relationships that it advocates on the basis of fidelity to the Biblical text as divine revelation."²³⁹

The reconstructionist group of feminist theologians adopt a middle stance between the two models presented above: from the reformist engagement, reconstructionist proponents take the commitment to considering the Bible as means of reconstructing a positive

²³² Cf. Thiselton, *Hermeneutics. An Introduction*, 297ff.

²³³ Cf. Clifford, *Introducing Feminist Theology*, 32-38.

²³⁴ I take the article cited in the following as referential for this purpose: C. Nunes & H.J.M. van Deventer, *Feminist Interpretation in the Context of Reformational Theology: a Consideration*, in: *In die Skriflig* 43(4)/2009, 737-760, 740-741. For the same typology cf. Clifford, *Introducing Feminist Theology*, 32-38.

²³⁵ Thiselton, *Hermeneutics. An Introduction*, 297.

²³⁶ Clifford, *Introducing Feminist Theology*, 32, also cf. Osiek, *The Feminist and the Bible* b, 960-961.

²³⁷ Clifford, *Introducing Feminist Theology*, 33.

²³⁸ Osiek, *The Feminist and the Bible* b, 962.

²³⁹ Osiek, *The Feminist and the Bible* b, 963.

Christian theology for women, while at the same maintaining a critical attitude towards Tradition on the role of woman in and outside the Church.²⁴⁰ The liberating theological core lies therefore within the Christian tradition. It involves opting for betterment with repercussions not only on church structures, but also on civil society.²⁴¹

Some representatives would be reconstructionist Biblical scholars such as Rosemary Radford Ruether, Phyllis Trible and Elizabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza. Ruether sees feminism as part of a general movement of liberation for all, both male and female,²⁴² who are subjected to oppression having as scope “the promotion of the full humanity of women.”²⁴³ Trible operates with a revisionist hermeneutics, whereas Schüssler-Fiorenza works from within the framework of a liberationist model.²⁴⁴

Irrespective of their degree of involvement with societal change, what is common to all orientations is the attempt to ground theoretical considerations into praxis. Instead of a competing standpoint as the one noted by Schüssler-Fiorenza in which one should choose between the world of the Bible and the world we live in, nowadays a compromise is sought. This is evident in formulations that counterbalance the deleterious effects of patriarchy on society.

The hermeneutical question which is formulated now and to which the no longer concurring gender-related options attempt an answer is the following: “is it legitimate to start Biblical interpretation from a historical situation?” or “how can the freedom of the text be maintained?”²⁴⁵

The feminist discourse enters the theological debate by adopting a critical stance of the historical-critical method that is predominant and accepted overall by Biblical scholarship. The necessity for a gender-informed hermeneutics is prompted by the fact that “malestream interpretations [...] are either positioned within the historical paradigm of interpretation and tend to be caught up in the factual, objectivist and antiquarian framework of Biblical studies, or they are at home in a literary formalist paradigm of Biblical studies and insist that we are not able to move beyond the kyriocentric text to the historical reality of wo/men.”²⁴⁶

²⁴⁰ Sawyer, *Feminist Interpretation*, 232.

²⁴¹ Clifford, *Introducing Feminist Theology*, 33.

²⁴² Sawyer, *Feminist Interpretation*, 232.

²⁴³ Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Sexism and God-talk: Toward a Feminist Theology*, Boston: Beacon Press, 1983, 18.

²⁴⁴ Nunes and van Deventer, *Feminist Interpretation in the Context of Reformational Theology*, 740-741.

²⁴⁵ José Miguez Bonino, *Theology and Theologians of the New World: II. Latin America*, in: *Expository Times* 87/1976, 196-200, 199.

²⁴⁶ Schüssler-Fiorenza, *Wisdom Ways*, 136.

In the concise historical overview of the movement, the importance of the interplay between past tradition and present experience, namely women's experience was mentioned. Women's experience is the aid for the interpretation of the sacred texts. Throughout the tradition of interpretation, such experience has been altered by gendered interpretations of the texts. When employing gender as an analytical tool, glossing over such experiences is sought if not to be eliminated, then pointed at in texts.

In an attempt to correct any pre-understanding, some feminists engage in the reconstructive endeavour relevant for the current praxis, whereas others opt for a more hermeneutical stance, in which revealing the gender informed biases represents the first step towards liberation.

Mainly seen as a process of conscientization or awareness-raising, feminist Biblical interpretations aim to enlighten the group, in this case women, of the structures of internalized oppression, having as end result the liberation from them.²⁴⁷

Once feminist consciousness is activated, disclosing the oppression and injustice detected in the social fiber of our society is unmasked and thus the road towards elimination of such injustice is open. However, any subsequent action rests on its prior thorough theorization. Awareness-raising occurs by updating the Biblical message for contemporary Christians being inherently always informed by the socio-theological context of the interpreter. Schüssler-Fiorenza considers the context to be as important as the text, because "what we see depends on where we stand."²⁴⁸

More concretely, the feminist perspectives offer a reading against the grain, a strategy, which was mentioned in the earlier subsections.

Thus, in Gerard Graff's formulation, it "does not take texts' apparent context and intentions at face value, but looks at the doubts they repress or leave unsaid and how this repressed or 'absent' element can undermine or undo what the text says."²⁴⁹

A gender-informed experience works against the grain, against the Tradition. It actually means in a radical sense breaking down old ways of seeing, as well as in a more moderate understanding, working liberating expressions of feminist discourse within the frame provided by the patriarchal culture.

Turning to vitiated, respectively androcentric interpretations, language is to a certain extent, the source of evil for the feminist enterprise for it locks in it expressions, which point at an injustice concerning the fair textual treatment of gendered images. Such an

²⁴⁷ Schüssler-Fiorenza, *Wisdom Ways*, 93, 208.

²⁴⁸ Schüssler-Fiorenza, *Wisdom Ways*, 96.

²⁴⁹ Nolan Fewell, *Reading the Bible Ideologically, Feminist Criticism*, 277.

observation rests on the assumption that “language does not merely represent some reality “out there” but itself makes up that reality as it weaves the very fabric of human interaction in historically specific, socially constructed and thoroughly political ways.”²⁵⁰

Biblical texts with a feminist substance, more precisely, their messages, either prescriptive, or descriptive have been used equally in discourses of liberation, as well as in discourses of oppression. Language points to a more extensive comprehension of the role of interpreters in the interpretive community, at a certain moment in time.

Besides the awareness-raising of feminist studies during the process of unravelling patriarchal biases, the multiplicity of readings and interpretations stresses the importance of learning from them, from the female images they attempt to disclose, as well as from the fact that our internal forum and means of expression are neither universal, nor identical.

Taking them into consideration can only benefit in enlarging the interpreters’ horizons. The key concept informing our horizons is pre-understanding, respectively “what we inherit from the wisdom or common sense of the community and traditions into which we were born and educated.”²⁵¹

Admitting to such coordinates, interpretation is motivated by interests that comprise “power, desire, self-affirmation, self-aggrandizement, and forces of oppression.”²⁵² One should be cautious and disregard some of the general categories associated with the historical-critical method, but also pay equally amount of attention to the ideological character of texts.

This discernment revolves around the critical distinction between reading-in and reading-out.

In the first case, wishful thinking, moulded by a present interest and projected into a text cannot always have textual support and will be suspect of ideology, by denying any other approaches or valid interpretations to the text.

Reading-out is what a demonstrable truth is needed²⁵³ and therefore the contextual historical and sociological recovered data becomes very important.

The result for the first attitude is a limited exposition, retrodictive in character and which cannot adequately discern the large historical gap between contemporary and ancient societies. It reads contemporary concerns back into the Scripture. That is why the second attitude is not only preferred but also scholarly approved.

²⁵⁰ Tolbert, *Social, Sociological and Anthropological Methods*, 258.

²⁵¹ Thiselton *Hermeneutics. An Introduction*, 17.

²⁵² Thiselton, *Hermeneutics. An Introduction*, 18; cf. Jürgen Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interest* (2nd ed.), London: Heinemann, 1978.

²⁵³ Fander, *Historical-Critical Methods*, 217-218.

One should however note that because of their proclaimed contextual character, the contribution of gender-informed analysis to the Biblical scholarship is only partial.

The danger of contextual theologies lies precisely in their strength: while their focus is small, they adduce very important information, neglected by a more general, enlarged exposition; however, the validity of the overfocused analysis should not stretch beyond its scope. It should remain functional within the boundaries of its focus. Starting to generalize from a narrow perspective could turn out to be a faulty endeavour.

With the proper attitude and within a rightly delineated paradigm, contextual theologies can serve the purpose of shedding light on so far neglected aspects of the New Testament.

1.5. Delineating feminist perspectives with regard to 'apocalypse' and Apocalypse

In the following, I will delineate some common points feminist critical claims and the apocalypse, as a literary genre share.

All these will be reiterated and further analyzed as the body of the dissertation narrows its focus onto the description of the Great Whore, as emerging from the vision of Apocalypse 17.

Generally speaking, 'apocalypse' began to be extensively valued historically and especially generically, beginning with the second half of the last century just as the gender-informed movement.

The *complete*²⁵⁴ definition of the apocalypse as a literary genre is as follows:

*Genre of revelatory literature with a narrative framework, in which a revelation is mediated by an otherworldly being to a human recipient disclosing a transcendent reality which is both temporal, insofar as it envisages eschatological salvation, and spatial insofar as it involves another, supernatural world*²⁵⁵, *intended to interpret present, earthly circumstances in light of the supernatural world and of the future, and to influence both the understanding and the behaviour of the audience by means of divine authority.*²⁵⁶

First, apocalypses belong to a narrower grouping of revelatory literature.

²⁵⁴ By 'complete', I mean with the later additions to the *Semeia* definition (cf. John J. Collins, Towards the Morphology of a Genre, in: *Semeia* 14/1979, 1-20), by Hellholm (cf. . D. Hellholm, The Problem of Apocalyptic Genre and the Apocalypse of John, in: *Semeia* 36/1986, 13-64, also David Aune, The Apocalypse of John and the Problem of Genre, in: *Semeia*, 36/1986, 65-96) and Yarbrow Collins (cf. Adela Yarbrow Collins, Introduction: Early Christian Apocalypticism, in: *Semeia* 36/1986, 1-12).

²⁵⁵ Collins, Towards the Morphology of a Genre, 9.

²⁵⁶ Yarbrow Collins, Introduction: Early Christian Apocalypticism, 7.

They are one of its subgenres, together with oracles, testaments, hekhalot texts²⁵⁷ and the parable as a means of giving expression to the perspective of apocalyptic eschatology and as a vehicle for expressing the ideology of an apocalyptic movement, as well as other writings that show an interest in speculative, or “scientific matters” of the cosmos.

Research on ‘apocalypse’ as literary genre in its own right embraced concepts of *indeterminacy*, *mysteries* and *divine secrets* revealed within a *vision*, having *angels* as interpreters and *seers* to record communications with the divine.

Apocalypses emerged as writings of the apocalyptic movements that have affinities with the historical development of the contextual expressions of feminism, because these are intrinsically linked with experience of marginalization, oppression, deprivation. Such types of experiences shape the possibility of another perspective on reality.

With both outlooks, language was all about uncertainty. It had powers residing in the ‘feeling mind’ of the readers, who could activate these. It is for this reason that involvement with the text was required, in a perpetual struggle to find new meaningful interpretations that could actualize the theological message.

The feminist and apocalyptic formulations are expressions of language internalization, of appropriating the ‘strange’, the ‘abnormal’, the ‘imaginary’.

The ‘wrapping of the message’ is attained usually by appeal to metaphorical language.

Evil is very poignant with apocalyptic formulation, but it has for feminist critical claims a gendered appearance. At this level, precisely, the ethical claims, one could challenge the text.

Feminist critical claims, as well as apocalypses are both interdisciplinary by nature. They cannot exist individually, separated from their historical context. The texts’ messages shape contemporary formulations, literary and social documents. That is the reason why ‘context’ is extremely important in understanding a text’s significance.

As such, their resources, or roots are extending beyond the biblical text *per se*.

Metaphors are not value neutral, nor are they devoid of any emotional component for they engage the reader’s imagination, in seeking to provoke a varying response.

²⁵⁷ Martha Himmelfarb, *Revelation and Rapture: the Transformation of the Visionary in the Ascent Apocalypses* in: J. J. Collins and J. H. Charlesworth (eds.) *Mysteries and Revelations: Apocalyptic Studies since the Uppsala Colloquium* (Journal for the Study of the Old Testament: Supplement Series 9), Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1991, 79-90, 85.

Because of the emotional contained in the gendered metaphors, the metaphor of the Great Whore still speaks to us, readers and continues to trigger response from readers nowadays.

As such, 'metaphors that point to a pejorative depiction of women possibly have a negative consequence for the perception (Ansehen) of real women, for their self-awareness and for their role [...]. A metaphorical illustration of violence against women proclaimed and conducted by God legitimates –in spite of the textual vividness –violence against women, carried out by men and that is effective via the images, in which a woman is threatened by humiliation, embarrassment, corporeal punishments.'²⁵⁸

Although in the vision of the Great Whore, violence occurs only tangentially, there are other themes and motifs which are equally demeaning: the woman's domain of adornment is addressed negatively, the Great whore is strongly delineated by sexuality and her behavior is threatening the humanity at a larger scale.

Because of the overall negative evaluation of the gendered metaphor of the Great Whore, Weems asserts, "Metaphors can hurt. Metaphors can distort. Metaphors can kill. Metaphors can oppress."²⁵⁹ They have the power to alter perception and form judgments by evoking in readers horizons of expectation, which are permanently either confirmed or infirmed.

It is within this context, that the hermeneutic of suspicion functions: on the one hand, it brings awareness, and subsequently suspicion with reference to 'commonplaces'. It looks into the ideological character of any written text, including the Bible. On the other hand, it enforces the construction of a type of 'cooperative resistance' of the readers. By 'cooperative resistance', I mean resisting the immasculation and the androcentric values, by interpreting them as ideological. At the same time, the hermeneutics of suspicion allows the text to creatively engage with the readers into generating a meaning and interpretation adequate for the contemporary world.

Given the metaphors' power of actively engaging the readers in the construction of the metaphorical meaning, one can only emphasize that the human aspect of the metaphorical construction implies drawing assumptions on real women in the weaving of the image fabric.

²⁵⁸ Ulrike Sals, *Die Biographie der Hure Babylon*, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004, 210; cf. Paul Duff, *Who Rides the Beast? Prophetic Rivalry and the Rhetoric of Crisis in the Churches of the Apocalypse*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001, 35. The appeal to the rhetorical tropes as materialized in the OT marriage metaphor will further develop this idea into what masculinity and femininity really imply in the dynamics of the metaphor reception.

²⁵⁹ Weems, *Battered Love*, 110.

Reversely, the image finds reverberations in influencing the perception of actual women. This happens continuously between the text and its recipients, because “metaphorical language doesn’t only have informative functions, but also performative ones.”²⁶⁰

Not only does it influence the perception of actual women, but it also reinforces, by means of stereotypical logic, the negative views on female sexuality.

More specifically, and with relevance to the Great Whore if a whore is a woman, eventually condemned for her acts, that somehow attaches to the essence of a ‘woman’, in a very negative way, as well as creates a framework in which violence against women is accepted and possibly justified.

“Prostitution, like fornication (whose vocabulary it shares) presents a female profile, despite the fact that both activities require active male participation. This asymmetry of conception and nomenclature is a characteristic feature of patriarchal societies, reflecting a general pattern of asymmetry in gender-related roles, value and obligations.”²⁶¹

Concerning the above observations, Sutter Rehmann acknowledges the depiction of the prostitute to address John’s actual contemporary context. In doing so, she considers whores’ uncertain working milieu, also as a criticism to the ones who engage and sustain such ignominious practices.²⁶²

Similarly, in view of conceptual metaphor theory “Revelation’s metaphoric language necessitates giving full weight to associations evoked by the ‘source domain’ –which, in this case would be the familiar figure of the brothel worker or streetwalker.”²⁶³

In view of the above, Hanna Stenström notes the following:

*“[...] an image as “Babylon the Prostitute” Babylon speaks, on one, explicit level, about an earthly power which is not obedient to God. Still, on an implicit level, it reflects, expresses and reinforces views of female prostitutes, which are linked to views of women in general.”*²⁶⁴

²⁶⁰ Kirsten Nielsen, *There is Hope for a Tree. The Tree as Metaphor in Isaiah* (Journal for the Study of Old Testament, Supplement Series 65), Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1989, 56-60, as quoted in: Sals, *Die Biographie*, 42.

²⁶¹ Phyllis Bird, Prostitution in the Social World and the Religious Rhetoric of Ancient Israel, in: Christopher A. Faraone, Laura K. McClure, *Prostitutes and Courtesans in the Ancient World* (Wisconsin Studies in Classics Series), Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2006, 40-58, 47.

²⁶² Luzia Sutter Rehmann: Die Offenbarung Johannes: Inspiration aus Patmos, in: Luise Schotttroff/ Marie-Theres Wacker (eds.), *Kompendium Feministische Bibelauslegung*, (2nd ed.), Gütersloh: Chr. Kaiser Verlagshaus/Gütersloher Verlaghaus, 1998, 725-741, 735, cf. Jennifer A. Glancy, Stephen D. Moore, How Typical a Roman Prostitute is Revelation’s ‘Great Whore’?, in: *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 130 (3)/2011: 543-562, 557.

²⁶³ Glancy and Moore, How Typical a Roman Prostitute, 552 (ft.4).

²⁶⁴ Hanna Stenström, *The Book of Revelation. Vision of the Ultimate Liberation or the Ultimate Backlash?*, 53.

The gendered metaphor with all its components and implications cannot simply be dismissed on account of being 'just a metaphor' "as if metaphor were some kind of container form from which meaning can be extracted, or as if gender relations inscribed on a metaphorical level are somehow less problematic than a literal level."²⁶⁵

By adopting this approach, in the process of constientization, as a result of a 'reading against the grain', I am expressing the desire to limit the linguistically offensive character of such a derogatory depiction as the one of the Great Whore in the Apocalypse. The context plays here a significant role by tempering the overfocus on the generic markers, especially when perceived not in ancient categories, but in modern and postmodern ones, aiming to provide a more positive evaluation of hermeneutics of suspicion.

General Assessment

I have shown that various expressions of the feminist outlook offer an interesting awareness regarding gender issues. They also bear relevance on societal structures, politics, by including in its interpretative agenda a deeper dimension to the texts of the Bible, via literary approaches.

In other words, what contextual hermeneutics in general, and feminism in particular attempt to, is working with the Biblical material in such a way that it brings out the positive and usefulness, or relevance for the present situation on the one hand, by concomitantly acknowledging their *ethical and socio-political potential*.²⁶⁶

Feminist perspectives entail different approaches situated in a very broad context. These are sometimes overlapping or co-existing. Nevertheless, all of these are contributions to the theoretical perspective of feminism, being located at the intersection with social cleavages, such as race, gender, class.

The feminist evaluation provides thus the lenses through which the choice of method and approaches are assessed into meaningful critical analysis.

²⁶⁵ J. Cheryl Exum, *Plotted, Shot, and Painted: Cultural Representations of Biblical Women* (Journal for the Study of Old Testament Supplement Series 215/ Gender, Culture, Theory 3), Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996, 119.

²⁶⁶ Oda Wischmeyer, *Texte, Text und Rezeption. Das Paradigma der Text-Rezeptions-Hermeneutik des Neuen Testaments*, in: O. Wischmeyer/S. Scholz (eds.) *Die Bibel als Text*, Tübingen/Basel 2008: A. Francke Verlag, 155-192, 187.

The current evaluation takes into consideration first and foremost, the chief parameter against which all contextual theologies develop, namely the acknowledgement of *historical conditionedness*, taken from the change in paradigm of human sciences (i.e. Geisteswissenschaften) and holding validity in theological discourse.

Subsequently, the notion of the *hermeneutical circle* was advanced to explicate the provisional, contextual character of knowledge.

For studies with a feminist substance, the notion revolves around unmasking *patriarchy* as well as *androcentrism* from societal structures, which were for centuries, subservient to *masculinist* biased interests. Such a practical oriental orientation has set a liberative aim for the gender-informed studies in general.

For the Biblical studies in particular, a gender-related perspective takes interest in the actualization, as well as relevance of the ancient texts of Bible for the present context and thus shape so as to accommodate contemporary concerns.

A new conceptualization of revelation is imposed. Accordingly, revelation cannot be transposed into our time “like a self-enclosed capsule which holds theological truth to exist in a sphere of its own, unaffected by scientific discoveries or knowledge.”²⁶⁷ Instead, it incorporates formulations regarding 20th century changes in the process of understanding bearing print on the manner in which reality is perceived and understood.

As such, analogous concepts with historical conditionedness, such as *authority* or *validity* could be questioned, as well as given deeper dimensions neglected so far.

The Enlightenment category of *academic objectivity* resulting from employing the historical-critical method in theology was reshaped into a new one. The above mentioned method resulted into undermining “marginalized reading communities by insisting that their questions and experiences are superfluous to Scripture and their interpretations legitimate, because of their failure to remain objective.”²⁶⁸

Nonetheless, the historical approach applied to Biblical texts gives valuable information concerning the redactional layers of the text and points at the multiple traditions relevant to the Bible, as well as it offers overall a re-evaluation of the texts by employing a strategy named *hermeneutics of suspicion*.

²⁶⁷ Daphne Hampson, *Theology and Feminism*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990, 14.

²⁶⁸ Renita J. Weems, Racism and Ethnocentrism in Feminist Biblical Interpretation, in: Elizabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza (ed.), *Searching the Scriptures, Volume 1*, 101-116, 103, cf. eadem, *Reading Her Way through the Struggle*, 66.

Pertaining to the historical part of the above mentioned method, some of the representatives of feminist perspectives ventured into historical reconstruction, where, by looking into other historical documents, they attempt at rewriting the historical facts by including the generic character into discourse.

Unfortunately, the extent to which some go is not at all laudable. Many of the reconstructionist endeavours of the feminists, although they start properly by applying the hermeneutics of suspicion, go astray by reducing the analytical categories so as to serve their pre-understanding.

Additionally, the causal linkage between past and present realities can be disastrous for the feminists attempting a historical reconstruction, since negative gender stereotypes could be perpetuated as in the following observation.

“It could be argued that since women are not in positions of authority in the present, social realities must have kept them from those positions in the past.”²⁶⁹

For the reasons enumerated above, I think that historical reconstruction should limit itself to providing a *corrective* approach, if necessary, by referring at the most to extra-canonical, or cross cultural sources or resources on women in Antiquity, as Schüssler-Fiorenza wisely admits.²⁷⁰

“A fundamental methodological insight of historical criticism of the Bible was the realization that the *Sitz im Leben* or life setting of a text is as important for its understanding as its actual formulation.”²⁷¹ With such an observation, the context, more precisely a particular one, i.e. the social became the object of study.

The sociological perspective associated with gender-informed theory in order to foster an extremely beneficial alliance with liberation theology, practically engaged in a discourse against oppression.

Constientization leads to liberation, which in this case meant liberation from oppressive androcentric structures supported by a culturally and universally acknowledged patriarchal regime. For the process of constientization to be effective both in the academic domain and in ecclesial Biblical interpretation, “it must always have both a theoretical *and* a practical goal.”²⁷² In this way, the need for anchoring the phenomenon in contemporary realities, with generic interests is acknowledged.

²⁶⁹ Tolbert, *Social, Sociological and Anthropological Methods*, 267.

²⁷⁰ Schüssler-Fiorenza, *Wisdom Ways*, 140.

²⁷¹ Schüssler-Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*, xv.

²⁷² Schüssler-Fiorenza, *Wisdom Ways*, 97.

Such state of emancipation would be attained by employing a hermeneutics of suspicion, and this formulation is not at all new for the feminist theologians. However, with socio-critical vision the ideology critique is important. It adduces the question of who would benefit (*cui bono?*) from keeping a certain status quo along the centuries, especially when generic issues are in view.

Moreover, the relevance of the Bible for today includes references to the contextuality of women's experience, manifested more frequently in the feminist discourse, as one of oppression and marginalization.

As soon as such formulations find their ways in the theological discourse bearing social undertones, there are some cautionary steps, which need to be followed if we wish to maintain our concerns to remain within the boundaries of academic scholarship. This is especially important, given the difficulty of generalizing when starting from a particular context, or shaping of a particular perspective.

To assert that the experience of women entails marginalization and oppression is to tell only one side of the story and the propagation of such statements could have quite opposite effects for women in general: it legitimizes, the practiced tradition of patriarchy for the current context, as well as it deems the guilt of the latter for such a stance toward women.

Instead, the feminist concerns set their analysis relevant for the contemporary context by trying to understand the *motives* behind the derogatory discourse practices against women. They look therefore into the information provided from outside sources –other than the Biblical texts for clues on the status and role of women in Ancient societies, contemporary to the world of the Bible.

As a result, accommodating the message of the Bible to contemporary concerns should remain at the metacritical level. Offering valuable insights, it needs to remain as detached as possible and subservient to a hermeneutics of trust.

Such a balanced attitude is totally opposed to employing a critique socio-pragmatically, where selectivity, interests serving a more or less hidden agenda are too narrow in scope and therefore not descriptive for women in general.

In the second case, reading too much of our culture into the Bible runs the risks of blurring the sharpness of the usage and occurrences of, for example, one word in its theological or cultural understanding.²⁷³

²⁷³ The relevant example in question revolves around the correct interpretation of the word *father*; cf. Thiselton, *Hermeneutics*, 291. While some feminist interpretations, reductionist by the type of argument they choose, remain anchored in the generic usage of the word, when for example it might have very likely carried

General categories pertaining to a literary optic, such as *meaning* and *interpretation*, the triad *author-text-reader* and the intricacies of *reading* as process, also *language* as means of locking deeper levels of communication were explored by the diverse approaches stemming from literary studies. These, paired with other structural coordinates such as *plot*, *characters*, *point of view* etc. gave the Biblical texts rich contours never so far examined.

The literary, historical and theological approaches assert that meaning, or at least some understanding of it resides in the written text. "They take the text [...] either as window through which to look out on historical events, theological ideas, or cultural attitudes, or as a house of mirrors, reflecting internally the grammar, syntax, plot, characters, and settings of narratives."²⁷⁴

While for modernism, the actual realization of ideological stances is located in the text, with newer postmodern theories, the *reader/ interpreter* gained more focus. As a result, "neither can the text remain an innocent signifier, nor the reading an innocent activity."²⁷⁵

Subsequently, *reader-response theories* focus on the reading process as the subjective manifestation of every reader, in particular deeply anchored in the experience of their gendered existence. The ones who employ radical stances of postmodern approaches run the risk of transforming the values of the interpreter into authority and their endeavour will result into disregarding the text up to the point of reducing it, of 'subjectifying' it to the minute application of a method.

The above remark is not to diminish the value of postmodernist interpretations, because just like other contextual approaches to Bible, feminists believe in the validity of multiple interpretations as long as the frameworks against which they develop the formulations are clearly delineated.

Experience, although personal is valid for every reader approaching the text open-minded. Only in this way transforms the transformation of the provisional horizon during the reading process.

parental undertones, such a nurture, which is generally valid for both mothers and fathers, drawing thus awareness on the cultural and theological usage of the word.

²⁷⁴ Fowler, *Figuring Mark's Reader*, 50-83.

²⁷⁵ R. S. Sugirtharajah, *The End of Biblical Studies*, in: Fernando F. Segovia (ed.), *Toward a New Heaven and a New Earth. Essays in Honour of Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza*, Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2003, 133-140, 138 referring to Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1978.

Even if there are variables to reader-situations, the gender-informed option for socio-pragmatic approaches may not always be the best to follow as with them. There is the danger of projecting too much our 'image' onto Biblical texts which results into disconsidering their revelatory character.

Experience informs our hermeneutical circle, by which we gain understanding on the surrounding phenomena. Also acts as a filter to our interests, unmasking the ideological character of some patriarchal readings.

Bearing relevance to the Biblical texts, language becomes more important. When faced with the written text of an apocalypse, the modern reader is puzzled, bedazzled by the narration; he/she may encounter difficulties in getting the message of the book across, since the abundant symbolism.

The modern mentality rejected language about the supernatural world as ontologically meaningless; the apocalyptic mode of depicting reality was seen, at its very best, as deeply permeated by sensorial expressions: with the Apocalypse of John, what is real is what can be perceived with the senses, measured and tested or at least verbalized.

This could account for the reserve in addressing apocalyptic texts, with their poetic imageries, rich symbolism and metaphorical expressions.²⁷⁶

Indeed, the stylistic expressions materialized in the language of apocalypses are poetic, expressive, repetitive, and full of scriptural and mythological allusions. They could be viewed from a modern perspective as inconsistent or even incoherent,²⁷⁷ for they apparently contain an amalgam of disorderly, contradictory, or inconsistent scenarios.

In addition, the vocabulary of apocalyptic texts is characteristically cryptic and projects a degree of mystery and indeterminacy that allows for multiple and often concurrent understandings, appreciations and interpretations.²⁷⁸

Some observations are imposed:

First, gender-informed interpretations reprimand language as too ambivalent deeply permeated by its androcentric function. Language is inclusive of women. Although it not mentions them explicitly "[...] it mentions women only when women's behavior presents a

²⁷⁶ Adela Yarbro Collins, *Cosmology and Eschatology in Jewish and Christian Apocalypticism*, (Supplements to the Journal for the Study of Judaism, vol.50), Leiden: Brill, 1996, 17.

²⁷⁷ John J. Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination: An Introduction to Jewish Apocalyptic Literature* (2nd ed.), Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998, 108.

²⁷⁸ Lorenzo diTommaso, Apocalypses and Apocalypticism in Antiquity (Part I), in: *Currents in Biblical Research*, 5 (2)/2007, 235-286, 247.

problem or when women are exceptional individuals. Scholars understand and interpret such androcentric language in a twofold way: as generic and as gender specific.”²⁷⁹

The second aspect concerns the entity of linguistic interest is the *metaphor*, displaying a rhetorical function, which is generated by the meaning permeated in the text and activated by readers.

Metaphors have been frequently treated as subsumed to all questions about “the women in the Bible”²⁸⁰, which prompted the rediscovery of every single woman in Bible and promoting them as supportive models for Christian women for the canon-within-a-canon approach. The process continues with an ongoing awareness concerning the androcentrism of the texts, evident in deeper levels of analysis, where women as such are not representative and relevant, but are textual gendered constructions, with all their subsequent implications.

However, the goal of gender-informed approaches and critique of androcentrism do not resume to representing females, more appropriately gendered images in the Bible. Gender-related topics, or the reductionist approaches, which divide women in the Bible in two categories, victims or heroines strive for a wider acceptance of feminist studies by Biblical scholarship as a contribution, which “aims to provide a more adequate account of our gendered human nature and history”.²⁸¹

The rationale behind the detailed theoretical exposé is on the one the hand, to justify the need for integrative gender-informed theories of my feminist analysis. On the other hand, it aims to provide the theoretical basis on what is to follow, meaning the application of the method, where further explication of key-concepts should no longer be impetuous.

The formulation of various influences evidence how a particular delineation of knowledge, as well as language and interpretation influence and transform any given theoretical framework and practice with regard to Biblical texts.

The perspective I chose to implement with my subsequent analysis concretizes in a reader’s oriented approach, with a special emphasis on gender constructions, in and outside the Biblical texts *per se*.

²⁷⁹ Schüssler-Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*, 43.

²⁸⁰ Hanna Stenström, *The Book of Revelation. A Vision of the Ultimate Liberation or the Ultimate Backlash?. A Study in 20th century interpretations of Rev 14:1-5, with special emphasis on feminist exegesis*, Uppsala: Uppsala University, 1999, 106.

²⁸¹ Phyllis A. Bird, What Makes a Feminist Reading Feminist? A Qualified Answer, in: Harold C. Washington, Susan Lochrie Graham and Pamela Thimmes (eds.), *Escaping Eden. New Feminist Perspectives on Bible*, New York: New York University Press/ UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999, 124-131, 130.

The text-oriented approach is crucial to grasping the feminist perspectives of Biblical texts. Also “extrinsic approaches such as history, sociology, psychology and anthropology provide an understanding of the originating circumstances (personal, social, historical and so on) for the hermeneutical approach.”²⁸²

Insights in Ancient societies, in which Biblical texts were written, as well as knowledge of the corresponding societal stratification and the literary genre of the ‘apocalypse’ become intensified. This knowledge is sometimes not only relevant, but directly responsible for the interpretation of feminine characters and gendered images.

As with any text of the Bible, the Apocalypse included many feminist scholars continue to justify interpretation by referring to the text itself. Whereas this is also principal, the text itself is not sufficient.

Since there are various text-typologies asking for different interpretations, therefore not all texts are created equal. As a result, one has to consider external factors, informing the context, equally important for defining our interpretation.

In view of the above, I do not think one can separate or overemphasize either of the two aspects. Without equal balance of both perspectives there would be not a valid or relevant interpretation corresponding to our times.

As stated previously, my present aim was on the one hand to show the insufficiency (and not inadequacy!) of employing a pure historical-critical method for a gender-critical analysis, at times reductionist for understanding and interpretation.

At the same time, I legitimate the embrace, or the broadening on behalf of theological feminist critique of the multiple approaches from various branches of the social and literary sciences.

The convoluted description had various nuances, prompted by various interests and concretized in different options of hermeneutical analysis. This rests on the assumption that 21st century Biblical hermeneutical endeavour must in all cases take into consideration the new developments, as well as orientations of the feminism as movement, while at the same time remaining highly respectful of the origins from which they originated.

In this manner, I aspire at *integrity* of an argumentative type, which, in spite of the declared gender-informed interest of the present dissertation can be achieved by an acknowledgment and not glossing over the limitations offered by the same theoretical frame, in this case the feminist optics.

Such limitations are partly caused by epistemological and historical contingencies of the current author, who belongs to a certain tradition of interpretation and who militates for

²⁸² McKnight, *A Sheep in Wolf's Clothing: An option in Contemporary New Testament Hermeneutics*, 334.

an *alternative* in her presentation, based on the openness given by a New Testament text. This argument is not however based on the pragmatic dictum “one exegesis looks as good as another”²⁸³, this alternative could be a valuable aid if one wants to reach *sensus plenior* of any text.

The criticism is always of a constructive type, mindful of the textual constructions.

I hope it was very clear from the above analysis that there is no single feminist monolithic theory, when analyzing Biblical texts with feminist content. Many perspectives can unfold, if one chooses to approach the text by giving importance to different social, political, historical, even cultural or literary aspects and thus obtain different gender-informed expressions. Moreover, none of the approaches undertaken, including the current one does claim full authority, or claim to have any limitations.

Any interpretation has validity because of the framework in which it emerges and follows the arguments pertaining to that particular referential framework. Also, it is valid for the interpreters, who know and legitimate the criteria of the particular critical endeavour. For this reason, this interpretation does not aim at convincing every reader, but encourages at embracing variety of perspectives and interpretations.

It must be specified at this point that this study will not adopt a reconstructive approach because of the fact that a traditional approach in exegesis emphasized this aspect, and as such the feminist reconstruction of the past using the Biblical text is very difficult to achieve especially with the modified perspective on what history means, namely with the loss of the category of objectivity attached to historical texts. One could run the risk of developing a model that did not exist in reality, precisely because feminist theology starts from its contextual character and so, it is quite difficult to make general valid claims.

Another reason is that once the text is no longer at the core of our interpretation, but the readers are, the reconstructive approach loses at its importance, as well as at its contemporary relevance for the present context in which the text is received, simply because readers’ hermeneutical horizons are differently informed now than they were in previous centuries.

Moreover, acknowledging the patriarchal control of some texts should not be taken to the other extreme as to show that it does not exist, by pursuing at great lengths a reconstructive approach to show for example that negative depictions of gendered characters do not exist, but rather the opposite. Or, if negative depictions do exist, then

²⁸³ Morgan, *Feminist Theological Interpretation of the New Testament*, 27.

they should be artificially transformed into positive ones. Such an endeavour is not acceptable simply because the text does not allow it.²⁸⁴

Also, I have in view limiting the highly speculative character of the historical reconstruction. It would be very hard to imagine and to relate to the Ancient world of the 1st century. That is why I will limit myself to an understanding of the categories expressed in the 1st century C.E. informed by intertextual sources as well as sociological data, but with the generic categories of the 21st century reader.

Based on the classification offered by Eryl Davies,²⁸⁵ I would consider my approach to the Apocalypse holistic, yet bearing a gender-informed undertone. Subsequently, although my focus of analysis represents Apocalypse 17, I consider the *Whore* as ‘apocalypse’, or apocalyptic writing situated in the larger intratextual framework informed by the comparison and contrast with other gendered images of the Apocalypse, respectively Apocalypse 2, 12, 21. Also, the intertextual literary and sociological horizons will also be explored.

However, I would like to maintain that the essence of the gendered image of the Great Whore hopefully will not be dissolved by including it in the larger picture. On the contrary, this process could result into more attention and deeper level of understanding.

Additionally, with the Apocalypse in particular, the gender-related theoretical attempt presented earlier underlines that there are perhaps even more with this text than any other of the Bible, an array of not only possible, but also valid interpretations. This is possible due to fact that there are multiple criteria to choose from, which establish the validity of interpretations. What these criteria have in common is an acknowledgement of the fact that understanding mutual perceptions lies at the core of the concept ‘intersubjectivity’ discussed in the earlier sections of my hermeneutical reflection. Intersubjectivity presupposes dialogue, either with other readings or with other texts.

²⁸⁴ Fatum, *Women, Symbolic Universe and Structures of Silence*, 62.

²⁸⁵ Davies, *The Dissenting Reader*, 17-35. He enumerates in the chapter “Feminist Models of Reading” an “evolutionary” approach—revolving on a an advancing improvement on the treatment of women; “cultural relativism”—a theory that insists on reading Biblical androcentrism as rightfully embedded in the ancient cultural context of the ancient Near East, is followed by the “rejectionist” approach—that sees no hope for the Bible in general as well as the entire Biblical tradition for being too irredeemably imbued with patriarchal thought; a “canon-within-a-canon” approach—selectively presents and evaluates specific Biblical texts as supportive of women in their fight against a patriarchal mode of dominance. The “holistic” approach comprises pages 29 to 31 and argues for the broadening of the horizon against which the biblical treatment of women unfolds.

I have shown the implications of the decision to read any Biblical text (the Apocalypse included), with or without the corresponding intertexts. Moreover, with the readers or interpreters, preferring a gender-informed reading or interpretation, I have shown that certain readings appeal to certain people and the reason for any option lies in the “relation of an interpretation to a person’s social location and political agenda”.²⁸⁶

My current academic endeavour enlists as postmodern because it deals with a new understanding of text, of interpretation through the optics of gender, as analytical tool.

The pastoral relevance of the present study shows that “how we read, understand, interpret and use Biblical texts related to the very identity of Christian faith and stands at the heart of Christian theology.”²⁸⁷ What a gender-informed perspective may offer is a corrective interpretation, which opens and fosters new hermeneutical horizons.

²⁸⁶ Barr, Conclusion. Choosing Between Readings: Questions and Criteria, 168.

²⁸⁷ Thiselton, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics*, 2.

2. History of Research

The interpretation of the gendered image of the Great Whore in the Apocalypse of John was not confined to the boundaries of theological exegesis but furnished matter of interest to other academic territories, each of them approaching the topic from different angles. The spectrum includes not necessarily theological readings. Examples like these bear relevance to economic globalization, colonialist, respectively post-colonialist studies, present-centric perspective on the world with emphasis on the ideology of power and politics, either openly or subversively presented, an idea affiliated mostly with different expressions of liberation theologies.

Materialistic readings were also advanced other focusing on the depiction and development of literary motifs etc. Gender as culturally inscribed and socially active category was not so heavily problematized in theology except from the direction of gendered-informed postmodern literary theory.

Therefore, the current dissertation will make tangentially reference to other feminist areas, but will focus more on gender as evidenced from reading the book of Revelation in particular.

With postmodernism, the approach towards Apocalypse changed, precisely in that some of the proponents opt more and more convincingly for an ahistorical type of reading, which includes a more poignant interest for the literary and social character of the readings.

The questions are therefore formulated with reference to no longer “just *what* happened, but *how* is the event portrayed in the Apocalypse and *why* it is portrayed in such manner.”²⁸⁸

Such questions are extremely relevant for the unfolding of the present study.

The *manner* in which the image of the Great Whore develops stands referentially to well-known commonplaces from OT and vernacular depictions with anti-propagandistic literary features, as well as having political and ideological undertones. This process revolves around a rhetorical strategy by which persuasiveness is gained into visualizing the role of women historically, as well as culturally.

Maybe to the *reason* behind opting for a gendered image, besides the traditional answer, namely because there was a context, or a tradition against which the imagery in Apocalypse unfolds, one could also add the observation that such an imagery was simply

²⁸⁸ David L. Barr, Introduction. Reading Revelation Today: Consensus and Innovations, in: idem (ed.), *Reading the Book of Revelation. A Resource for Students* (Society for Biblical Literature 44: Resources for Biblical Studies), Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2003, 1-11, 6 (emphasis his).

effective. Its formulation and rhetorical employment arouse various emotional and ethical responses from readers across ages.

Not only the context of the production of a text is important, but also the context of its reception, which for a contemporary gender-informed exegesis means updating the theological message of the book in a way that reclaims full humanity of women.

Nevertheless, as previously mentioned one is however aware that *gender* did not stand at the centre of preoccupation for the context of production. It assumed this position rather tardily in the history of the text's reception. This tendency is inscribed in the tradition of actualization, aiming to read the Biblical text as fitting to the contemporary's readers situation and circumstances.²⁸⁹

2.1 Coordinates of the main analyses of feminine imagery in the Apocalypse of John

2.1.1 Gendered images overall in the Apocalypse

Both the fluidity as well the polyvalence of imagery²⁹⁰ and uniqueness of the Apocalypse have been greatly acknowledged and extensively compared and contrasted with any other book of the New Testament.

The feminist academic interest manifested primarily in the feminine imagery depicted in the Apocalypse. What I mean by 'feminine imagery' in the Apocalypse is the textual depiction of the four major women figures, respectively Jezebel (2:18-29), the Woman clothed with the Sun (12:1-7), the Whore Babylon (17:1-6.18) and the Bride of the Lamb (19; 21; 22).

Moreover, I would also mention the other implied reference to women in 14:4, namely the *virgins* (παρθένοι) who have not defiled themselves with women. These instances conjoin generic constructs formulated from an androcentric perspective with additional issues of *sexuality, misogyny, power and hierarchy, purity and defilement, sexualized violence and divine punishment*, as well as the scene against which ancient myths are reiterated.

²⁸⁹ Cf. Christopher Rowland, Foreword, in: Steve Moyise (ed.), *Studies in the Book of Revelation*, ix-xvii, xv.

²⁹⁰ Ian Boxall, The Many Faces of Babylon the Great: Wirkungsgeschichte and the Interpretation of Revelation 17, in: Steve Moyise (ed.), *Studies in the Book of Revelation*, 51-69, 55.

The great bulk of feminist studies emerges starting with the second half of the 20th century and is intrinsically connected as presented earlier with the different expression of liberation theology.

Often, the feminine imagery of the Apocalypse had proved to raise a certain extent turmoil and dissatisfaction with the manner of its depiction, at least from the perspective of liberated contemporary women.

Feminist scholars have attempted to deal with this dissatisfaction in developing loopholes in currently accepted methodological strategies and/or developing new ones, obtained by the cross fertilization of gender studies with other academic fields.

Clearly, the manner to approach the feminine imagery was a pregnant question, for it seems that, approaching the text literally causes confusion today as it caused back in the day.²⁹¹

As a result, scholarship enlists a wide pallet of readings, from apologetic, more positive ones to gloomier, rather negative ones. Every orientation of these individual studies is measured by the degree of embedment in other contemporary academic disciplines and trends.

As a good rule, the feminist interest for the first group of readings opts for metaphorical understandings of individual feminine imagery, whereas the less positive readings identify with rather with corporeal readings of gendered imagery.

Another valuable observation for a current gender-informed interest in the Apocalypse is provided by the extent to which the last book of the Bible is relevant, or speaks both to current realities, and/or our faith communities.

I am supporting the standpoint that the above mentioned paths of exegetical analysis of the Apocalypse need not necessarily be opposable to each other, namely, either as reading it into any faith community or as distancing it from any application to any contemporary faith community, by emphasizing the historical and socio-cultural realities pertaining to its origins.

In the first case, suspicion would arise to the point of rejecting the message of the Apocalypse as a whole, due to its violent imagery, derogatory gendered images and blunt dualism.

These accusations do not match the sensibility our society notes with regard to generic issues.

²⁹¹ Cf. the early receptions of the text as presented in Lynn R. Huber, *Like a Bride Adorned: Reading Metaphor in John's Apocalypse* (Emory Studies in Early Christianity 12), New York: T&T Clark International, 2007, 5-15.

Alternatively, there is the risk of setting the book into a permanent fixed frame, just like a piece in the museum, which can be visited and revisited provided one has the necessary fixed set of tools to analyze it. So, it becomes totally irrelevant for current times.

Given the above, a series of questions could be formulated.

Can theologians still offer a valid interpretation to the Apocalypse, which should remain theological while keeping with the relevance for its contemporary readers? Can/Should we reconstruct the past for the present, or is it more, as I propose, an attempt at understanding the past for the present?

For this, is it legitimate to go from a contemporary context and claim that any textual imagery corresponds entirely a social reality? If so, then to what extent does such symbolism shape reality?

More concretely, is the feminine imagery of the Whore of Babylon as representative for John's attitude to women both in the seven communities as well as overall in the Apocalypse? How much of the Seer's attitude maps actually the main tendency in the Ancient societal behaviour?

Since the current dissertation has relevance primarily for the field of New Testament exegesis, I believe it is necessary for exegetes to work interdisciplinary with the Apocalypse, even more intensively than with any other book of the New Testament. An acknowledgement of the 'context' is with this perspective, safeguarded. Otherwise, the reception of the Apocalypse is very susceptible to erroneous interpretations.

Subsequently, not only the context, but also cautious employment of literary features are needed.

Feminine imagery of the Apocalypse has been labeled in the feminist field within the following sematic field, where adjectives such as *negative*, *passive*, *archetypal*, *limiting*, *stereotypical*, therefore *degrading* are frequently encountered.

Academic stances on this subject were taken in the form of articles, books, doctoral dissertations, well researched entries in Biblical commentaries and as well as lexica, and more recently different feminist companions to individual books of the Bible. Some of these will feature as arguments of my dissertation unfold.

In view of these, "the interpretative perspective has ceased to be solely about *eschaton* and became instead a means of interpreting every age of human existence."²⁹² It became more ontological in nature.

²⁹² Rowland, Foreword, in: Steve Moyise (ed.), *Studies in the Book of Revelation*, ix-xvii, xv.

The feminist reading interest in the Apocalypse goes as far back as the end of the 19th century, more exactly 1895, when Elizabeth Cady Stanton had *The Woman's Bible* published.

Although *The Woman's Bible* is not considered nowadays serious in its entity, it is notable that the first feminist approach to the Apocalypse came from outside the academic world, namely as cultural and political filter in advocating women's emancipatory rights.

Her comments on the Apocalypse unveil the subjection of women. In this way, the apocalypse is not an exception because her comment is valid, in her opinion, for the entire Bible that "in its teachings degrades Women from Genesis to Revelation." The Holy Writ was used throughout the centuries as a means to preserve the social and political status quo, and therefore deprive women from accessing full citizenship and equal rights.

Stanton's highly anti-Catholic reading pervades the whole of *The Woman's Bible*, concluding "whoever wrote the Revelation was evidently the victim of a terrible and extravagant imagination and of visions, which make the blood curdle."²⁹³

Especially with the emergence and establishment of liberation theologies, the Apocalypse remained present throughout the 20th century in the pastoral reflections, gaining more and more exposure.

The book is used both as argument and as counter-argument in depicting and relating to contemporary realities, where women struggle for regaining their identity. As a result, it bears primarily social, economic, cultural aspects, and secondarily, it is theological in character and entails ethical concerns.

Hence, the feminist interest gains more and academic terrain with some contemporary authors. These authors attempted at better understanding the contemporary contexts also from the optics provided by ancient literary, theologically inspired Biblical texts.

The interest in the Apocalypse, at least from a historical perspective was closely associated with the emergence of different expressions of liberation theologies.

It elaborated a "correspondence of relationship between Revelation in its context and their socio-political context" with strong social undertones as "the imagery of chapters 13 and 17-18 as well as chapters 20-21 is very popular with the peasants and the poor in Central and South America, who are reading the Bible in Christian base communities. Since the Apocalypse depicts the exploitation of the poor and the concentration of wealth in the hands of the powerful, the injustices perpetrated by the colonialist state, and a society that

²⁹³ Elizabeth Cady Stanton, *The Woman's Bible*, Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1993, 179.

has grown obscene by perpetrating stark contrasts between the rich and the poor, they can read it as speaking to their own situation of poverty and oppression.”²⁹⁴

Though Revelation, as shown above, may be a liberating text in a certain specific context for certain communities as shown above, I strongly believe the liberationist reading of the Apocalypse to be, to a large extent, oblivious of the choice of metaphors, more precisely of gendered metaphors, because of their larger scope, namely reading the book “as an unflinching prophetic proclamation of justice that speaks the truth to power no matter the cost, and as divine declaration that the violent designs of power of ‘this world’ will result in their own undoing.”²⁹⁵

The socio-cultural and ethical considerations have therefore shaped the theologically-oriented spectrum of studies, where the corporeal reference of the feminine textual depictions suffers some transformation.

Historically (and chronologically), we move from the non-corporeal interpretations, relying at their best on traditional metaphorical depictions of Ancient cities, as well as mythical creatures engaging in heavenly combats, to more corporeal depictions, given theology’s crossing boundaries over to literary postmodernist expressions.

As a result, with the emergence of the feminist inquiries, the Apocalypse gradually gains feminist substance.

Methodologically, this matter of fact increases from various interpretations to critique of different ideologies in the Bible.

The common denominator for these is that gender-informed Biblical exegetical analyses on the Apocalypse claim a deeper non-literal understanding of feminine imagery.

Language, as rhetorical tool, in which metaphorical expressions are locked with a gender-informed potential awaits for concretization in contemporary context and for contemporary readers. As a result, such imagery hides various ideological stances visible when one applies the *hermeneutics of suspicion*, a strategy which was explicated previously.

²⁹⁴ Elisabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza, *Revelation: Vision of Just World* (Proclamation Commentaries), Minneapolis: Augsburg Press, 1991, 11.

²⁹⁵ Jean-Pierre Ruiz, Taking a Stand on the Sand of the Seashore: A Postcolonial Exploration of Revelation 13, in: David L. Barr (ed.), *Reading the Book of Revelation. A Resource for Students*, Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2004, 119-135, 122-123.

Therefore, the most common focus characterizing the feminist discourse on the feminine imagery of the Apocalypse is to explore language in its manifestations loaded by metaphorical textual instances.

The creative powers of language, its multiple layers of reference and rhetorical devices, as well as the inter- and intra-textual relationships to other texts having similar motif clusters has been extensively analyzed.

As point of interest was the discussion on how to understand the grammatical gender found in the text. Postmodern perspectives on the vision of the Great Whore contradict the assumption that generic referents of the image should never be taken as referring to the biological sex.

With traditional argumentations, “using a masculine pronoun about something does not imply that it is in fact imagined as a male sexual being” and in virtue of this “female readers may well choose to read even such androcentric, women-excluding text as Revelation as inclusive of themselves, thus exercising their freedom of interpretation and reclaiming the text for themselves.”²⁹⁶

The rather traditional gender-informed interpretations fostered by the methodological umbrella of historical-critical method retain a certain intertextual frame of reference to various degrees, namely the OT imagery tradition of personifying of cities as women. These references along with other will be mentioned in a later subsection.

In apocalyptic literature, the potential resides in the fact that language transgresses the literal boundaries into serving the larger scope of rhetoric. The mythopoetic²⁹⁷ capacity of language displays a continuous referential power; therefore, multiple meanings of every symbol are not only accepted, but also demanded by the very nature of language. However progressive this may initially sound, “the meanings of the language in Revelation are limited by the literary context, the socio-historical situation and the rhetorical project.”²⁹⁸

Non-literal language usually implies the use of (gendered) metaphors, which becomes the medium by which an evocative image sets a “common ground of mutual experience and

²⁹⁶ Stenström, *The Book of Revelation. A Vision of the Ultimate Liberation or the Ultimate Backlash?*, 238 making a footnote reference to Schüssler-Fiorenza’s *Vision of a Just World*, 14.

The contemporary postmodern gendered reader’s perspective advances the concept of *immasculation*.

²⁹⁷ Elizabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza, *The Book of Revelation: Justice and Judgment* (2nd ed.), Fortress Press, Minneapolis, 1998, 181, she quotes Amos Niven Wilder, *Theopoetic*, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976, 79: “Our visions stories and utopias are not only aesthetic, they engage us.”

²⁹⁸ Stenström, *The Book of Revelation. A Vision of the Ultimate Backlash?*, 228.

belief.”²⁹⁹ The contemporary readers’ perspectives and the apocalyptic nature of the Apocalypse allow for establishing a common denominator due to an ontological dimension of experience elaborated in mythical patterns.

In his article ‘Myth and History: Deconstructing John’s Characterizations’, David L. Barr states that “John has so dressed his women in mythic guise that they no longer appear to be mortals.”³⁰⁰ Either conceived of as Queen Mother (Jezebel), or Queen Consort (The Bride of the Lamb), Queen Ruler (Whore of Babylon), or Queen of Heaven (Woman Clothed with Sun)³⁰¹ or re-enacting myths,³⁰² they are generic symbolic constructs.

Adela Yarbro Collins also taps into the mythological resources of dealing with the feminine imagery in the Apocalypse. She assesses such imagery from a Gunkelian³⁰³ perspective of the history of religions, as well as employs a Jungian approach,³⁰⁴ which values a psychological interpretation of apocalyptic gendered images.

From Ancient models, she retains references to the ‘combat myth’,³⁰⁵ which deals with the dichotomist, antagonist battle between order and chaos, good and evil. This cosmic battle is a widespread *topos* among civilizations of the ancient Near East, including Judaism.

The same binary system operating within the above mentioned paradigm applies here as the distinction between ‘good’ and ‘evil’ is applied in evaluating feminine imagery in the Apocalypse.

²⁹⁹ Eva Maria Räßle, *The Metaphor of the City in the Apocalypse of John* (Studies in Biblical Literature 67), New York: Peter Lang, 2004, 109.

³⁰⁰ David L. Barr, Women in Myth and History: Deconstructing John’s Characterizations, in: Amy-Jill Levine, Maria Mayo Robbins (eds.), *A Feminist Companion to John’s Apocalypse*, London, New York: T&T Clark International, 2009, 55-68, 56.

³⁰¹ Barr, Women in Myth and History, 57-61.

³⁰² Barr mentions the existing versions of Chaos myth in Egyptian, Greek, Roman and Jewish cultures (Barr, Women in Myth and History, 59). For a mythological approach also cf. Adela Yarbro Collins, *The Combat Myth in the Book of Revelation* (Harvard Dissertations in Religion 9), Missoula: Scholar’s Press, 1976.

³⁰³ I refer to Hermann Gunkel, *Schöpfung und Chaos in Urzeit und Endzeit: Eine religionsgeschichtliche Untersuchung über Gen 1 und Ap Jo 12*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1895.

³⁰⁴ Cf. Adela Yarbro Collins, Feminine Symbolism in the Book of Revelation, in: *Biblical Interpretation*, 1(1)/1993, 20-33.

NOTE! Since the author mentioned above has a similarly named article in *A Feminist Companion to John’s Apocalypse*, for the sake of convenience, I refer to the article published in *Biblical Interpretation* ‘Feminine Symbolism in the Book of Revelation a’ and the article pushed in *A Feminist Companion to John’s Apocalypse* ‘Feminine Symbolism in the Book of Revelation b’.

³⁰⁵ Yarbro Collins, *The Combat Myth*, 57-58.

Apocalypse 12 and 21 as a whole imagine the community of the faithful inspired by Isa 54, whereas Apocalypse 17 and 2 refer to a *hubris* –a claim of authority undignifying to God interpreted by the fallen community (cf. Isa 1:21, Hos 1-4).

If the combat myth, with its mythical characters partially allows for a positive assessment of the feminine imagery in the Apocalypse, the Jungian reading of the text is not that optimist.

Adela Yarbro Collins concludes that “the particular forms of the feminine symbols [in Revelation] [...] are limited and limiting for women[...] women are defined in terms of their sexual and reproductive roles.”³⁰⁶

Such depictions may have pernicious consequences as John’s language remains “disturbing and dangerous”. In her article on the feminine symbols of the Apocalypse, Yarbro Collins states that “John’s feminine imagery is dangerous because (whether intentionally or not) it promotes an ethos in which women are not allowed to control their own bodies and their own destinies and in which violence against women is –at least in some cases – condoned.”³⁰⁷

Convinced of the politico-rhetorical character of language, Elizabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza readily admits “the female imagery of the Book of Revelation would be completely misconstrued if it were understood as referring to the actual behaviour of individual women.”³⁰⁸

“The images of women used by Revelation were not intended to, nor should they ever legitimate violence against women of any kind [...] any effort to associate them with actual people represents a gross misuse of the text.”³⁰⁹

However, in calling attention to “ambiguity, openness and indeterminacy”³¹⁰ of the language inviting to “imaginative participation”³¹¹ Elizabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza contends that “Revelation engages the imagination of the contemporary reader to perceive women

³⁰⁶ Adela Yarbro Collins, *Feminine Symbolism in the Book of Revelation*, in: Amy-Jill Levine, Maria Mayo Robbins (eds.), *A Feminist Companion to John’s Apocalypse*, 121-131, cf. eadem, *Feminine Symbolism in the Book of Revelation* a.

³⁰⁷ Garrett, *Revelation*, 474.

³⁰⁸ Schüssler-Fiorenza, *Vision of a Just World*, 96 cf. eadem, *Justice and Judgment*, 219-222.

³⁰⁹ Wes Howard Brook, Anthony Gwyther, *Unveiling Empire. Reading Revelation Then and Now* (Bible & Liberation), Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1999, 162.

³¹⁰ Schüssler-Fiorenza, *Justice and Judgment*, 186; Schüssler-Fiorenza, Introduction: Research Perspectives on the Book of Revelation, in: eadem, *ibidem*, 21-23.

In acknowledging the fact that Revelation is written in mythopoetic language, could open up a possible interpretation of the Great Whore Babylon as the great Mother Goddess (cf. Schüssler-Fiorenza, *Vision of Just World*, 96).

³¹¹ Schüssler-Fiorenza, *Justice and Judgment*, 186, 187.

in terms of good and evil, pure or impure, heavenly or destructive, helpless or powerless, bride or temptress, wife or whore,”³¹² something quite dangerous –I would add.

Schüssler-Fiorenza warns the readers of “the danger of understanding this feminine symbolization in a literalist fashion is acute if readers do not critically distance themselves from John’s vitriolic polemics against a leading wo/man prophet but instead naturalize the feminine figuration of the opposition between Rome’s and G*d’s power.”³¹³

Moreover, she still sees that the “basic paradigm of the Apocalypse is not holy war and destruction but justice and judgment.”³¹⁴ For this reason, she interprets the Apocalypse overall as a *vision of a just world*.

Nevertheless, some feminists are not ready to accept the above-mentioned conclusion: “[...] even if one understands the ‘point’ of Revelation’s various references to women, John’s language remains disturbing and dangerous.”³¹⁵

Additionally, to the stereotyping of women’s roles in the Apocalypse, Allison Jack writes that “in a text in which opposition and struggle are key, defining features, it is not surprising that stereotyping and even demonization are used as literary devices. In Revelation, it is not women alone who are subjected to such treatment. Many other images and symbols are offered as expressions of the forces of evil.”³¹⁶

Leaving aside the intra-textual interpretations of gendered imagery as pervasive from the text of the Apocalypse, the intertextual references valued by many interpreters of Revelation emphasize the metaphorical or symbolic meaning of the sexual and female images in the book, derived from Old Testament traditions.

For instance, Renita Weems claimed that reference to Apocalypse 19: 1-8 celebrate violence and rejoice over the bloodthirsty vengeance against opponents who are depicted in misogynistic metaphors drawn from among the deadliest in the Bible’s prophetic literature.³¹⁷

³¹² Schüssler-Fiorenza, *Justice and Judgment*, 199.

³¹³ Elizabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza, The Words of Prophecy: Reading the Apocalypse Theologically, in: Steve Moyise (ed.), *Studies in the Book of Revelation*, 1-19, 13.

³¹⁴ Schüssler-Fiorenza, The Words of Prophecy, 19.

³¹⁵ Garrett, Revelation, 474.

³¹⁶ Alison Jack, Out of Wilderness: Feminist Perspectives on the Book of Revelation, in: Steven Moyise (ed.), *Studies in the Book of Revelation*, 149-162, 161.

³¹⁷ Jean-Pierre Ruiz, Praise and Politics in Revelation 19:1-10, in: Steven Moyise (ed.), *Studies in the Book of Revelation*, 69-84, 80, with reference to Renita J. Weems, *Battered Love: Marriage, Sex and violence in the Book of Revelation* (Overtures to Biblical Theology), Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans/Carlisle: Paternoster, 1999, 946.

According to Weems, *whoring* and *fornication* operate as metaphors for *idolatry*. The symbolic understanding of Israel as bride and wife of Yahweh is part of the prophetic-apocalyptic tradition.

Both aspects must be subjected to feminist critique, but with Weems, their gendered meaning cannot be assumed as primary within the narrative contextualization of the Apocalypse.

The main dissatisfaction I encounter with exegetical analyses of this sort, is that these neglect the impact of the corporeal aspect on the readers. My suspicion is that such interpreters fret over pushing the boundaries of the gendered metaphorical language, tapping into its potency, for it may cause a destabilization in the textual objectivity of an academic enterprise.

And this is a stigma many feminists cannot bear. For fear of becoming much too involved within any interpretation, traditional interpretations they avoid making subjective judgments, interpreters choose the already trodden paths of their predecessors.

In their argumentations, the different socio-cultural paradigms to which John's references (e.g. one-sex model) are often used as an excuse for the existence of such a text.

By contrast, postmodern gender-informed analyses of gendered images question whether the ancient model has any relevance for the present context. If yes, then how are we to grapple with such images?

Recently various stances of postmodern theory are finding their way into Biblical exegesis. The postmodern interest in the Apocalypse enlists efforts to unveil the ideological character of the text, rather than to salvage some of its derogatory content. In this process, they employ strategies aiming at resisting *immasculation*³¹⁸ and subsequently minimize the internalization of misogyny.³¹⁹ Subsequently, the following inquiries can be formulated: How do women perceive such a text? How do women perceive other women depicted in this text? Is the manner in which feminine imagery of the Apocalypse dealt with meant to alienate us?

More general scrutiny delves into how 'real' are the readings the readers produce?

³¹⁸ Fetterley, *The Resisting Reader*, xii.

³¹⁹ George Aichele et al. (eds.), *The Postmodern Bible* (The Bible and Culture Collective), New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1995, 37.

Such prerequisites are important because Apocalypse's reading and interpretation carry ideological functions for the current context social and have consequences for the gendered readership in general.

Reader-response criticism plays currently an important role in the postmodern movement by opening Biblical scholarship to literary and cultural critical theory.³²⁰ "Interpreters are being challenged to take responsibility" for their standpoint, for "the theological, social, and ethical implications of their readings".³²¹ In other words, "there is no such thing as innocent reading, we must say what reading we are guilty of."³²²

The type and identity of the reader I am envisioning for the gendered imagery in the Book of Revelation is a believer. As such, strong belief in the Apocalypse as communicating God's ultimate message of redemption is sustained. Because of this reason, the text of the Apocalypse is to be viewed primarily as theological text and secondarily as literary or culturally relevant one.

Also, there are therefore certain preconditions, which need to be fulfilled in order to attain academic value, namely an acceptance of "the value system and the concern of the Church [...] found in the text because they are put there by the implied author (inspired author) and are required of the implied reader (the Church, the inspired reader)."³²³

This attitude triggers an impossibility of rejecting the text, no matter how violent, misogynistic it may apparently be.

Some of the most "(in)famous" interpretations on the gendered images of the Apocalypse have been produced by among others by Tina Pippin, Marla Selvidge and more recently Hanna Stenström and Avaren Ipsen.

From a strictly gender-informed perspective, the main accusation is that feminine imagery of the Apocalypse is dichotomist, reductionist, because descriptions vacillate between two options: the pious, asexual good woman and the heretical, lustful prostitute.

³²⁰ Aichele, *The Postmodern Bible*, 4.

³²¹ Danna Nolan Fewell, *Reading Between Texts: Intertextuality and the Hebrew Bible*. Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1992, 9.

³²² Louis Althusser From Capital to Marx's Philosophy, in: Louis Althusser and Etienne Balibar, *Reading Capital* (trans. Ben Brewster), New York: Verso, 1970, 11-39, 14.

³²³ Terrence J. Keegan, *Interpreting the Bible: A Popular introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics*, New York: Paulist, 1985, 155.

“Apocalypse is not a safe space for women”³²⁴ states Tina Pippin as “they are killed or ‘prepared as a bride adorned for her husband’. The female who is safe in exile in the wilderness is alone, her child is taken from her.”³²⁵

Continuing, she argues that “all the females in the Apocalypse are victims; they are objects of desire and violence because they are all stereotyped, archetypal images of the female rather than the embodiment of power and control over their own lives in the real or fantastic worlds,”³²⁶ being portrayed as “virgin, whore, mother-beloved and hated –but always under male control and domination.”³²⁷ Her negative assessment on the feminine imagery in the Apocalypse extends even to the more positive depiction of the New Jerusalem, for she states: “the New Jerusalem is a woman, but women are not included in the utopian city. God’s future world excludes women, but not before marginalizing them first.”³²⁸ Her bitter conclusion reads:

*“In the Apocalypse narrative, gender oppression is left untouched by the sword of God. The tale of the Apocalypse is not a tale of the liberation of female consciousness. The Apocalypse is not a tale for women.”*³²⁹

For the fact that the Apocalypse is unliberating and misogynist, she urges women “to be about the business of creating their own apocalyptic tales, their own utopian narratives.”³³⁰

Similarly, Marla J. Selvidge, in her 1996 article “Reflections on Violence and Pornography: Misogyny in the Apocalypse and Ancient Hebrew Prophecy” envisages the “pornographic death threats and scenes against women in order to make its predictions of terror.”³³¹

Since pornography ranks high with her assessment, its definition is based on three criteria enunciated by Letty M. Russell,³³² namely as the negative depiction of female sexuality,

³²⁴ Tina Pippin, *Death and Desire: The Rhetoric of Gender in the Apocalypse of John* (Literary Currents in Biblical Interpretations), Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1992, 80.

³²⁵ Tina Pippin, The Revelation to John, in: Elizabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza (ed.), *Searching the Scriptures, Volume 2*, New York: Crossroad, 1994, 109- 130, 119.

³²⁶ Pippin, *Death and Desire*, 72.

³²⁷ Tina Pippin, Eros and the End: Reading for Gender in the Apocalypse of John, in: *Semeia* 59/1992, 193-210, 200.

³²⁸ Pippin, Eros and the End, 195.

³²⁹ Pippin, *Death and Desire*, 105.

³³⁰ Pippin, *Death and Desire*, 105.

³³¹ Marla J. Selvidge, Reflections on Violence and Pornography: Misogyny in the Apocalypse and Ancient Hebrew Prophecy, in: Athalya Brenner (ed.), *A Feminist Companion to the Hebrew Bible in the New Testament* (The Feminist Companion to the Bible 10), Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996, 274-285, 275.

³³² For further reference cf. Letty M. Russell (ed.). *Feminist Interpretation of the Bible*, Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1985, 87.

implying also degradation of women as well as subjecting the female sexuality under men's possession and control. In this view, women in the Apocalypse are objectified and as such are "sadistically brutalized", and/or "violently coerced".

To the statement, that Revelation is certainly a text "not 'about' women... but use(s) women figuratively to make a point about something else... [it] 'us(es) women to think with'"³³³, Hanna Stenström argues on the difficulty of changing these conventional negative images of women, especially when they are perceived in the opposition *pure* vs. *impure* in what she calls 'purity language'.³³⁴

With the various formulations of postmodernist stances, the engagement of the Biblical text with the reader operates on more than one level, namely not only cognitively but also affectively materialized in the new subjectivity the latter gains. Neither readers, nor readings are gender-inclusive as the moderate feminist directions may indicate.

Precisely because of this extension of the text's reception to pastoral concerns, I acknowledge the importance of a gender-informed analysis that would find eventually a middle way between Biblical fundamentalists, postmodern readings and Christian liberal feminists.

2.1.2 Some relevant examples of gender-informed analysis of Apocalypse 17

The particular interest on gendered readings of the Great Whore Babylon is rather limited, considering not every exegetical analysis available necessarily has feminist content. Also, with some feminist exegetes, the Great Whore is only tangentially mentioned, usually as part of the well-known contrast in the Apocalypse between the Bride and the Whore.

As a result, current interpretations concerning the Great Whore are formulated against a context, composed from various traditions, be they theological or ideological. The current dissertation acknowledges the importance of reading with both types of contexts for the gender-informed analysis of Apocalypse 17.

Overstressing one understanding of 'context' in favour of another is a misreading of the text, unjustified and oblivious of readers either 'then' or 'now'.

³³³ Elizabeth A. Castelli, Romans, in: Elizabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza (ed.), *Searching the Scriptures, Volume 1*, 272-300 is presumably alluding to Karen King's formulation in: cf. Aichele, *The Postmodern Bible*; Also cf. Hanna Stenström, They have not defiled themselves with women...Christian Identity according to the Book of Revelation in: Amy-Jill Levine with Maya Robbins (eds.) *A Feminist Companion to the Apocalypse of John*, 33-54, 35.

³³⁴ Cf. Stenström, They have not defiled themselves with women, 33-54.

Along the rather traditional socio-political understandings of contextual relevance for the Great Whore, the context of feminist interpretation of the apocalyptic gendered images will also be evidenced.

Viewing the large spectrum of the studies concerning the Great Whore either primarily or tangentially, the current gender-informed analysis of the above mentioned character reaches beyond the identification of “grammatical gender and feminine figuration with natural gender and wo/men.”³³⁵

Gender analysis is at least from the modern reader’s perspective, a challenging pursuit. The role of readers is active as two views emerge: one, in which we look to the text through the glasses of gender and the other one, which sees a geopolitical symbol in the metaphorical language of John’s visions, where gender is only grammatically and culturally acknowledged, unable to deter us from the main theological message of the Apocalypse.

Different aspects associated traditionally with the Whore image in the Apocalypse were the city imagery imbued by the OT prophetic traditions. Additionally, the referential framework of the vision of the Great Whore included also Greek and Latin texts. More recently, the iconographic thesaurus of the Graeco-Roman Antiquity was also explored.

From a postmodern perspective, what is retained from the Biblical image is the sexual reference of this imagery, based on the not-yet-fully-proven hypothesis whether grammatical gender equates with sex and if as such, it helps in substantiating the claim for a gendered reading.³³⁶

With the extension of the interest in the figure of the Whore Babylon outside the exegetical academe, contributions of a less theological content picture her more and more as ‘woman’.

In these contributions, it becomes evident that the image in itself is a compound one, in which many ancient sources converge to represent the Great Whore.

The particularly relevant question is then to what extent are the Biblical texts able to be read without context? Of course, this question can be reversely addressed, namely how much of the feminine content of the imagery is lost by continuously referencing it to these ancient sources? To what extent is then such image speaking to us today?

³³⁵ Elizabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza, *The Power of the Word. Scripture and the Rhetoric of the Empire*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007, 135.

³³⁶ Such issue is taken up into discussion by Jorunn Økland, Why Can’t the Heavenly Miss Jerusalem Just Shut Up? in: Caroline Vander Stichele and Todd Penner (eds.), *Her Master's Tools? Feminist and Postcolonial Engagements of Historical-Critical Discourse* (Global Perspectives on Biblical Scholarship, Book 9), Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2005, 311-332, 315.

Examples and thematic orientations of the main feminist readings of the Whore Babylon in the Apocalypse of John take up motifs such as 'evil' as 'womanly', 'violence', 'whore', 'fornication', understanding the gendered character of ancient cities (the more traditional approaches), active (evil) vs. passive (good) relating to a honour-shame system as well as the social values associated with it.

Since the attitudes and interpretations in question vary to such an extent that they present totally arguable opposite stances to any theme, there are however certain points on which everyone agrees, namely that the Whore is a biased androcentric gendered image employed to depict evil, whose destruction is violent (although tackled differently). In other words, interpretations of the Great Whore carry some various messages, being either a politically-charged symbol, or a metaphor, or a mirror for contemporary realities.

Regarding the composition of the gendered image, a chief question troubles the exegete dealing with Apocalypse 17, namely why did the text or John opt for employing a gendered image? The answer could be that there was primarily a tradition to sustain such a usage and secondly because, such imagery was effective, in that it would not leave the readers indifferent.

As mentioned previously, there is no consensus, a universally valid interpretation of the Great Whore even within the feminist scholarship. There are different focuses, which result into different interpretations, or readings, as interaction with the text is achieved to various degrees.

The possibilities cover the chronological development of the image as well as mark the transition from socio-historical gendered-informed interpretations to feminist-critical ones. In the following, therefore, I will start by presenting the political perspectives implied in the image of the Great Whore. For authors such as Schüssler-Fiorenza, Kim and Rossing, the political undertones of the image of the Great Whore are far superior to the corporeal dimension.

The chief reference of Babylon as city is envisioned in its contemporary dimension—Rome (Schüssler-Fiorenza). Alternatively, it could be applicable to any postcolonial context (Kim). With Rossing, the political identification of Babylon prompts ultimately to a moral choice of readers between two gendered alternatives, the Whore (evil) and the Bride (good).

Already with readings such as the above, the literary character of the Apocalypse and of the Great Whore in particular gains more importance. Interpretations emphasizing the

implications of literary character have at core the (gendered) metaphor of the Great Whore. By establishing intertextual links with various traditions, such as the Old Testament (Sals), or by appeal to Graeco-Roman traditions (Huber), the image expands its interpretative horizons.

The contrast between the Great Whore and the Bride is the strategy commonly applied in order to obtain a better understanding on how the first gendered image operates. With Räßle, the metaphor's power of influencing readers is stressed.

Gradually, the metaphorical readings are no longer the focus of analyses such as Pippin's, who develops a literal reading of the Apocalypse and the Great Whore, having seriously damaging consequences on women's lives nowadays.

Considering the impact of the text of the Apocalypse on readers, sociological readings explain the implications of the gendered image of the Great Whore, relevant for contemporary realities.

For authors such as Roose, Glancy and Moore, the realities of the lives of prostitutes in John's day inspired the creation of the Great Whore.

However, the relevance of the text extends to postmodern contemporary readers in particular context, respectively The Netherlands (Vander Stichele) and United States of America (Ipsen). In these contexts, the image of the Great Whore is read from the prism of sex workers, who are marginalized. By extension, the appellative 'whore' functions as part of society's demonization of women in general.

The mythological (Yarbro Collins) and rhetorographical (Carey) perspectives also complete the spectrum within which the image of the Great Whore operates and manages to communicate relevant messages for contemporary readers.

To certain extent and various degrees, all these perspectives have in common the rhetorical forces of the metaphorical expression found in the depiction of the Prostitute, which Knust identifies in the slander discourse. There is a documented long history of attempts to include the textual references pertaining to sexual discourse into the category of ancient rhetorical tools.³³⁷ Sex was used 'to think with', that is to mark the boundaries of Christian identity,³³⁸ to delimit the borders between 'us' and 'them'.

³³⁷ Cf. Jennifer Wright Knust, *Abandoned to Lust. Sexual Slander and Ancient Christianity* (Gender, Theory and Religion), New York: Columbia University Press, 2006.

³³⁸ Knust, *Abandoned to Lust*, 1.

As a disclaimer, I would like to highlight the fact that these options are not clearly differentiated from other gender-informed ones, given the interdisciplinary character of feminist analyses in general.

Political focuses on the Great Whore

Such readings focus on the image of the Whore as a political symbol, as the Great Prostitute stands for the *collective enemy*, the corporate evil contemporary to John, namely Rome.

Sometimes, the one-to-one correspondence between Babylon and Rome can be extended beyond the latter; therefore it could apply to any politically exploitive regime.

Cities in the Ancient Near East were often described by feminine metaphors,³³⁹ and exegetes have been oscillating in finding the origin for that. As per psychological formulation, the city was “evidently a place of protection, nurture and provision”.³⁴⁰ It was also placed “in continuity with a long tradition of biblical and extrabiblical writings”, where the πόλις and the γυνή “stand for human communities or groups, either in faithful relationship to God, or in rebellion and infidelity.”³⁴¹

In this context, such image is referred to as “dead metaphor”, i.e. “a metaphor so deeply imbedded in the culture as to be virtually invisible, but nonetheless the source of everyday assumptions and speech,”³⁴² as expression of “conventional language”.³⁴³

³³⁹ This assumption should however be taken with particular caution in what regards the actual placing of this tradition, in history. As noted by Peggy L. Day, *The Personification of Cities in the Hebrew Bible*, in: Fernando Segovia, Mary Ann Tolbert (eds.), *Reading from this Place*, 283-302, 286, the presupposition of an old tradition in depicting females as cities, although based on numismatic proof of Aloysius Fitzgerald (*The Mythological Background for the Presentation of Jerusalem as a Queen and False Worship as Adultery in the Old Testament*, in: *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 34/1972, 406-413, 406) is refuted by George Francis Hill in *Catalogue of the Greek Coins of Phoenicia*, London: British Museum, 1910, who places the existence of such coins to the second century BCE and later, thus the evidence “postdates the biblical phenomenon of personifying cities as females” (Day, *The Personification of Cities*, 301).

³⁴⁰ Kathryn Pfisterer Darr, *Isaiah's Vision and the Family of God* (Literary Currents in Biblical Interpretation), Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1994, 126. For similarity of views cf. Frymer-Kensky, *In the Wake of the Goddesses*, 172, Sals, *Die Biographie*, 87, ft.132.

³⁴¹ Edith M. Humphrey, *A Tale of Two Cities*, 83.

³⁴² Julie Galambush, *Jerusalem in the Book of Ezekiel: The city as Yahweh's Wife*, (Society for Biblical Literature Dissertation Series 130), Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992, 20, 36.

³⁴³ “For its feminine figuration of the imperial city as ‘whore’, Revelation not only uses the conventional feminine metaphor for a city or a country –a verbal practice that is still in vogue today –but also relies on the prophetic language of the Hebrew Bible that indicts Jerusalem and the people of Israel for idolatry, which is metaphorically linked to prostitution, a figure of speech which was by then conventional language and would

With the depiction of the Great Whore-Babylon, grammatical gender is an accident, since “[...] then, as today, cities and countries were construed as feminine.”³⁴⁴

Exegetes employing this strategy try to prove is that the image of the Whore is contained in the larger image of the city, i.e. that womanly aspect is subsumed to an aspect of the city. The arguments for such claim are the references to Babylon in 14:8 and 18. With these backgrounds in mind, readings of this sort elaborate on the horrors of the Roman rule.

In particular, the political character revolves around the later explicit identification of the gendered apparition in 17:3 with a city, respectively in 17:18. The judgment and destruction of the one also named as ‘whore’ and ‘woman’ is placed into a ‘default frame’, respectively, a larger prophetic frame of the OT, which condemns either Israel (Hos 5:3), or individual cities³⁴⁵ such as Jerusalem, Tyre, Nineveh. We are speaking therefore of an original appropriation and actualization of the gendered imagery referring actually to a city. With the previously mentioned cities, prostitution, as a rhetorical feature ranks high being a dimension of expressing their unfaithfulness to God by engaging into idolatry-based acts. Additionally, the name of the Whore activates the oracle against Babylon in Jer 51.³⁴⁶

Elizabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza is the chief-advocate for a more positive reading of Apocalypse, in which the Whore is just a metaphor. It is clear that “the rhetorical-symbolic discourse of Revelation clearly understands [Babylon] as an imperial city and not an actual woman”,³⁴⁷ since the author of the Apocalypse was shown to be “familiar with the

have been understood by the hearers/readers of Revelation as such.” (Schüssler-Fiorenza, *The Power of the Word*, 135). In Schüssler-Fiorenza’s view, language is conceived as “convention or tool that enables readers to negotiate and create meaning in specific contexts and situations”³⁴³

³⁴⁴ Elizabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza, *Invitation to the Book of Revelation*, Garden City, NY: Doubleday&Co., 1981, 95-96.

First, I translate and read the grammatically masculine language of Revelation as conventional generic language (...). Second I translate and read the sexist language and female images in Revelation first as ‘conventional’, language which must be understood in its traditional and present meaning contexts. Whoring and fornication as metaphors for idolatry, as well as the symbolic understanding of Israel as bride and wife of Yahweh, are part and parcel of the prophetic apocalyptic tradition. They must be subject to a feminist critique, but their gendered meaning cannot be assumed to be primary within the narrative contextualization of Revelation. Cf. Schüssler-Fiorenza, *Vision of Just World*, 1991, 13.

³⁴⁵ Cf. Richard Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy: Studies in the Book of Revelation*, Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1993, 345. Also Sals, *Die Biographie*, xiii, 20, 189.

³⁴⁶ Pierre Prigent, *Commentary on the Apocalypse of St. John*, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004, 485. Cf. Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, 345.

³⁴⁷ Schüssler-Fiorenza, *Justice and Judgment*, 219.

feminine coding of the dualistic cultural pattern of ethical choice found in the Graeco-Roman and Jewish literature”.³⁴⁸

As a result, “[...] the harlot symbolizes cities as the places of human culture and political institutions and do not tell us anything about the author’s understanding of actual women.”³⁴⁹ In this view, the harlotry acts associated with the Whore, namely, fornication, and all the derivatives refer most probably to idolatrous stances.

From the above, it is clear that such formulations take into account the *political* character rather than the *corporeal*, in an attempt to whitewash the Great Whore.

As Schüssler-Fiorenza distances herself from the corporeal dimension of the gendered character in the Apocalypse 17-18, she marches with the insistence on what Babylon stands for, namely ‘imperial cult’, ‘exploitation’, ‘wealth’, ‘splendour’, ‘ruthless power’.³⁵⁰

Critically, however, chapter 17, especially in the beginning lines does not support such claims textually, since it is not a city, which is turned into a woman, but rather the opposite.

Moreover, some explanations of the Seer are taken literally to describe contemporary realities, being read through the prism of actual history, while some are not to be considered so.

Elements such as the ‘beast’, the ‘kings’, the ‘seven hills’, the ‘city with dominance’ point to Rome, and the Roman rule.

However, the doublet of the Whore, namely the Beast, the chronology of the kings attempted by most of historical-critical scholars, which has produced uncertain lists,³⁵¹ as well as ‘waters’ are neither descriptive of Rome, nor is there any evidence of Rome being depicted as seated on a beast. Neither is the eschatological war accurate,³⁵² nor are in view of recent data more recently persecutions resulting into martyrs.³⁵³

³⁴⁸ Elisabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza, *Babylon the Great: A Rhetorical-Political Reading of Revelation 17-18*, in: David L. Barr (ed.) *The Reality of Apocalypse: Rhetoric and Politics in the Book of Revelation* (Society of Biblical Literature Symposium Series 39), Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2006, 243-269, 264.

³⁴⁹ Schüssler-Fiorenza, *Vision of a Just World*, 96.

³⁵⁰ “Finally, I do not read Revelation just in terms of the sex and gender system but with reference to the Western patriarchal system and its interlocking structures of racism, classicism, colonialism and sexism. Such a reading will, for instance, pay attention not only to the sexual characterization of the figure of Babylon but also to its description in terms of high status, ruling power, egregious wealth and divine aspirations.” Schüssler-Fiorenza, *Revelation: Vision of Just World*, 14.

³⁵¹ Cf. Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 946-950.

³⁵² Cf. the detailed presentation in Aune, *Revelation 17-22*.

³⁵³ Cf. Leonard Thompson, *Reading the Book of Revelation*, 29-30. Cf. idem, *Ordinary Lives. John and His First Readers*, in: David L. Barr (ed.) *Reading the Book of Revelation. A Resource for Students*, London/Boston: Brill,

It is not in any way my intention to glide over such identification of the Great Harlot with Rome, for it may be, beyond any doubt, a very accurate identification in the dynamics of the Apocalypse.

Another aspect in the political interpretation of Apocalypse 17 (cf. Apocalypse 18) is also conceived in colonial terms, where the amalgamation of wealth and luxury corresponds to the degree of exploitation applicable to any colonialist state of this world.³⁵⁴

With Jean Kim,³⁵⁵ the Whore is not only depicted as oppressor, she is at the same time a victim, “the destroyer to be destroyed.”³⁵⁶ A metaphorical reading does not excuse her behaviour as either an oppressor, or an oppressed. Such reading would have as support the violent depictions of actions against the innocent on behalf of the Whore, but also against women, for which the Whore stands for.

Distancing from the text should be imposed in an attempt to conceive the construction of the gendered image as aiming at transmitting a message. The Whore of Babylon is nothing but a literary figure, not a woman in flesh and bone, thus incomparable to a real prostitute.

Her depiction rests on a mere literary convention, a commonplace, or *topos* argues Barbara Rossing, who develops Fiorenza’s theory of reading the symbolic world of the Apocalypse in terms of a “fitting response to its historical- rhetorical situation”,³⁵⁷ where the portrayal of the Great Whore stresses the dimension of the city metaphor.³⁵⁸ By developing the idea of a literary *topos* buttressed by prophetic and Graeco-Roman city traditions, the language “is safeguarded in scholarly interpretation, a lively concept is turned into a dead metaphor.”³⁵⁹

2004, 25-49, especially 31ff. Also, Ian Provan, Foul Spirits, Fornication and Finance. Revelation 18 from an Old Testament Perspective, in: *Journal for the Study of New Testament* 64/1996, 81-100, 97.

³⁵⁴ Enrique Dussel, *Ethics and Community* (trans. Robert R. Barr), Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1988, 28.

³⁵⁵ Jean K. Kim, Uncovering Her Wickedness: A Inter(con)textual Reading of Revelation 17 from a Postcolonial Feminist Perspective, in: *Journal for the Study of New Testament* 73/2002, 61-81, 73.

³⁵⁶ See Kim, Uncovering Her Wickedness, also Caroline Vander Stichele, Just a Whore. The Annihilation of Babylon According to Revelation 17:16 (no pagination), available at http://www.lectio.unibe.ch/00_1/j.htm (retrieved 21.10.2009). Cf. eadem, Re-membling the Whore: The Fate of Babylon According to Rev 17:16, in: Amy-Jill Levine, Maria Mayo Robbins (eds.), *A Feminist Companion to John’s Apocalypse*, 106-121, 106-121.

³⁵⁷ Schüssler-Fiorenza, *Justice and Judgment*, 183.

³⁵⁸ Cf. Barbara Rossing, *The Choice between Two Cities: Whore, Bride, and Empire in the Apocalypse*, Harrisburg: Trinity International Press, 1999, chapter 3.

³⁵⁹ Rossing, *The Choice*, 15.

At the level of the Apocalypse, the Whore of Rev 17 is usually compared and contrasted with other female images of the Revelation, to which it relates. It is opposed to the Woman clothed with the Sun (12: 1-2), who is a positive figure or even to the description of the Bride in 19:1-7, 21:2), sharing in common, the denomination –woman, γυνή (2:20, 12:1.6.13, 17:3.4.6.9.18, 19.7, 21:9) –thus dichotomizing them into good and bad women. Judgment as a result of impurity or impure acts attaches to Babylon to a significant extent.³⁶⁰

Additionally, Rossing develops in her rhetorical analysis two ancient literary *topoi* of the ‘evil woman’ vs. the ‘good woman’. The stereotyped rhetorical construct is rooted in the contrast between the *evil* and *good* woman, which is present in Biblical wisdom traditions (Prov 1-9)³⁶¹ and in Greco-Roman sources (Xenophon, *Memorabilia*. 2-1.21-22). The main rhetorical methods to describe the woman are personification *prosopopoiia*,³⁶² visual description *ekphrasis* and comparison *synkrisis*.³⁶³

In citing texts where vices are portrayed in human form³⁶⁴, the description of the Prostitute mirrors the description associated with the topos of the ‘evil woman’ where gaudy attire, purple and gold and jewels and cup were recurrent motifs.³⁶⁵

By linking the images of the ‘whore’ and ‘bride’ with the city imagery, readers of the Apocalypse are presented with two ethical options as ‘vice’ or ‘virtue’ are feminized and eventually they are persuaded to take the right decision.³⁶⁶

By appealing to the rhetorical strategy, the feminine images collude with the city tradition so interchangeably³⁶⁷ that the gendered images in Apocalypse bear no consequences for reading, since they are means descriptive of a rhetorical strategy, thus restricting, to a good extent, the implications of a metaphorical language.

Rossing interprets the images behind the language, as actions taken against the city, and not a person,³⁶⁸ as for her, the feminine imagery is secondary to the city imagery.³⁶⁹

And so, the choice the readers are left with is not a gendered choice but rather a political choice.³⁷⁰

³⁶⁰ Marshall, *Gender and Empire*, 29.

³⁶¹ The garb of the prostitutes echoes the one of Prov7:6-17. (Rossing, *The Choice*, 77).

³⁶² The personified characters serve as examples. Cf. Rossing, *The Choice*.

³⁶³ A contrast or comparison drawn between two elements” Rossing, *The Choice*, 23.

³⁶⁴ Rossing, *The Choice*, 20.

³⁶⁵ Rossing, *The Choice*, 38, 77-78.

³⁶⁶ Rossing, *The Choice*, 14.

³⁶⁷ Rossing, *The Choice*, 53.

³⁶⁸ She thus debunks what Pippin has argued, namely that the destruction of Babylon corroborated with her torture and rape is actually the one of a real woman. Rossing, *The Choice*, 87-90.

³⁶⁹ Rossing, *The Choice*, 144f.

Although mainly political in focus, the above mentioned interpretations unveil the fecundity of the interpretations of the gendered image of the Great Whore Babylon far beyond the political.

It could therefore be depoliticized, by holding on to the essence of the image. Such readings will be presented in the following.

With the above dimensions, the image of the Great Whore construes “as the symbol of the archetypal enmity against God or the sign for the general decadence of all civilization”, more positively, “as calling for appreciation of the transience of life or a symbol of the fleeting character of wealth and power.”³⁷¹

Despite their plausibility, these types of approaches are limiting the expressivity of the language as well as metaphor, by reducing the image to one dimension, thus enforcing one singular type of decoding as the accurate one. The items pertaining to the domain of ‘woman’ are thus functional to the extent they have a political, economical or ethical relevance. Gender is accidental.

However, the main critique Huber encounters with these readings concerns the impossibility of translating the imagistic language of the text into propositional language.³⁷²

Nevertheless, these approaches insist on the presentations of potential ancient backgrounds for the city metaphor.

Literary Readings of the Great Whore

These focus on close textual readings either considering the intratextual references with the Apocalypse or the intertextual references with other texts of the Bible.

The observation above is extremely important for understanding the manner in which the depiction of the Great Whore functions. Although, at times, not explicitly mentioned, I am very well aware of the difference in nuances that intertextuality poses, in particular with references to *allusions* and *echoes*.³⁷³ All these are structures according to themes and/or

³⁷⁰ Rossing, *The Choice*, 165, 183. “The choice for the good woman that the author of the Revelation wants us to make is not a gendered choice, nor an individualistic choice but rather a political choice”.

³⁷¹ Schüssler-Fiorenza, *Vision of a Just World*, 98.

³⁷² Huber, *Like a Bride Adorned*, 39-42. She offers as an example the equation between the ‘fine linen of the Bride’ of the Lamb with ‘the righteous deeds of the saints’ (19:8).

³⁷³ Steve Moyise, Intertextuality and the Study of the Old Testament in the New Testament, in: idem (ed.), *The Old Testament in the New Testament: Essays in Honour of J. L. North* (Journal for the Study of the New Testament: Supplement Series 189), Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000, 14-41; Steve Moyise,

individual elements identified in the presentation of the Great Whore. I will point to them as the current analysis develops.

In the following, I will not limit myself to presenting some of the most renowned intertextual references, but I will also present their shortcomings, as these represent an aspect usually oblivious with the proponents of such an approach. As a result, intertextuality does not function in terms of a perfect match of one text with other(s), but is rather reminiscent in an original way of standardized correspondences.

Nevertheless, this endeavour, namely that of overemphasizing the political character of the image in detriment to the generic one is obviously quite hard to ascertain for the postmodern readers of the Apocalypse, especially if she/he is not trained in a specific tradition of interpretation of the Church.

This argument deems pertinent the discussion on the relevance of the apocalyptic text for the 21st century readership, especially from the vantage point of a reader-response strategy informed by a gender-informed perspective.

With chief intertextual references, the descriptive texts provided by Ezekiel,³⁷⁴ Jeremiah are most pertinent.

Ezekiel 16:10-13 mentions “fine linen”, and “costly garments”, “jewels” (v.11), “gold and silver” (v.13) as well as “crown and bracelets” (v. 12), when describing the young virgin adorned by God.

I clothed you with embroidered cloth and with sandals of fine leather; I bound you in fine linen and covered you with rich fabric. I adorned you with ornaments: I put bracelets on your arms, a chain on your neck a ring on your nose, earrings in your ears, and a beautiful crown upon your head. You were adorned with gold and silver, while your clothing was of fine linen, rich fabric, and embroidered cloth.

Intertextuality and the Book of Revelation, in: Expository Times, 104/1993, 295-298; Gregory L. Linton, Reading the Apocalypse as Apocalypse. The Limits of the Genre, in: David L. Barr (ed.), *The Reality of Apocalypse. Rhetoric and Politics in the Book of Revelation* (Society for Biblical Literature, Symposium Series) Atlanta: Society for Biblical Studies, 2006, 9-41; Jon Paulien, Criteria and Assessment of Allusions to the Old Testament in the Book of Revelation, in: Steve Moyise (ed.), *Studies in the Book of Revelation*, 113-129; Gregory K. Beale, *John's Use of the Old Testament in Revelation* (Journal for the Study of New Testament. Supplement Series 166), Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998, 13-59.

Also Richard B. Bays, Stefan Alkier and Leroy Huizenga (eds.), *Reading the Bible Intertextually*, Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2009; Timothy K. Beal, Ideology and Intertextuality: surplus of Meaning and Controlling the Means of Productions, in: Danna Nolan Fewell, *Reading Texts Between Texts: Intertextuality and the Hebrew Bible*, Louisville: John Knox Press, 1992, 27-40.

³⁷⁴ Cf. Ruiz, *Ezekiel in the Apocalypse*. Also, Albert Vanhoye, L'utilisation du livre d'Ézékiel dans L'Apocalypse, in: *Biblica* 43/1962, 436-476, 441-442 (cf. Rossing, *The Choice*, 73).

With Ezekiel, woman's body parts feature ornaments,³⁷⁵ contrasting sharply with her nakedness.

However, such juxtaposition should be cautiously dealt with. With Ezekiel, there is a focus on body and bodily ornaments –named by Huber Yahweh's "voyeuristic gaze".³⁷⁶

John is not interested, unlike Ezekiel in the details of the woman's body –the description mainly aims at ornaments rather than body parts –he expresses fascination over the view/appearance as a whole.

Moreover, from the list in 17:4 as a whole, only gold is mentioned in Ezek 16:13.³⁷⁷

Additionally, Kowalski sees the difference between Ezek 16:10-13 and Rev 17:4 in the fact that the Whore is not adorned by God.³⁷⁸ The use of a perfect participle in medium form would exclude the divine intervention in offering social status.

In a similar fashion, Jer 3:16-24 envisages the evil woman/prostitute fully covered in jewels. Sometimes adornment was associated with adultery, an idea which repeatedly referred to Israel's lusting after and worshipping foreign gods (Ezek 16:17-18, 23, Hos 2:13).

"Just as red apparel, ornaments of gold and heavy makeup were inappropriate for modest women, so the loose woman's superficial attempts to improve her looks to stave off destruction were laughable and filthy."³⁷⁹

And you, O desolate one, what do you mean that you dress in crimson, that you deck yourself with ornaments of gold, that you enlarge your eyes with paint? In vain you beautify yourself. Your lovers despise you; they seek your life. (Jer 4:30)

Jer 4:30 maintains two elements of the description of the Whore in 17:3, namely, references to 'scarlet' and 'gold' (cf. also 17:16).

Other notable examples include Isa 1:21-31, which bears references to Jerusalem: the once faithful city is now a whore, and its corruption has reached unimaginable quota. Restoration is promised, as the city is transformed into a "city of righteousness, a faithful city" (1:26).

Isa 47 features indictment against Babylon, being mostly relevant if compared with the following chapter in the Apocalypse, namely Rev 18.

³⁷⁵ Huber, *Like a Bride Adorned*, 100.

³⁷⁶ Huber, *Like a Bride Adorned*, 99.

³⁷⁷ Rossing, *The Choice*, 74.

³⁷⁸ Kowalski, *Die Rezeption des Propheten Ezechiel*, 181.

³⁷⁹ Kim, *Uncovering Her Wickedness*, 72.

Cognates of 'prostitute' are descriptive of Tyre in Isa 23 and Nineveh, the "bloody city". Especially in the last example, references to Rev 18 are more pertinent, since they focus more on the economic trade pursued by Nineveh with the surrounding nations, similar to Babylon's.

In the Apocalypse, another dimension worth noting is the Exodus. This entails a very important aspect in the further detailed presentation of the Great Whore, especially concerning the religious overtones. The attire of the Great Whore resonates with priestly ornaments³⁸⁰: *scarlet* features with the description of the tabernacle in Exod 26:1, 36:8, *purple* as well as *gold* are also mentioned (Exod 25:4-5, 26: 1.29.36.37, 27:16, 28:5-8, 36:34).

In the characterization that follows this section, the Whore makes an unsuccessful attempt to imitate God: her posture, adornment and pretension of power is continually unmasked by divine emissaries throughout the unfolding of the apocalyptic eschatological scenario.

With reference to the Great Whore, Ulrike Sals takes Babylon as a Biblical construct, referenced in many prophetic writings to depict more than a geographical unit, especially with the reception of some of the OT texts such as Jer 50-51 and Rev 17-19.

From data provided by these texts, she sketches a biographical document of Babylon in its dual nature, namely of a 'city' or 'kingdom', as well as a 'woman' and 'principle', as portrayed in the apocalyptic text. Her work is a contribution to the metaphorical image of the city as woman, a contribution to gender research with reference to Biblical texts, as well a contribution to intertextuality of the/and with other Biblical texts, from an exegetical, theological and cultural perspective.

The very popular contrasting paradigm in the characterization of the Whore, namely the contrast between two gendered characters, the Whore Babylon and the Bride of Lamb takes on a different dimension as in the following.

The contrast with the Bride of the Lamb is very evident, not only at a textual level but also thematically.

As the Bride's opposite, the Great Whore joins the side of the evil, including also women in the Apocalypse, along with Jezebel of Rev 2, whom Humphrey considers "seemingly a local

³⁸⁰ Huber, *Like a Bride Adorned*, 98 (ft.36).

manifestation of 'Babylon'." ³⁸¹ The compatibility between the two will be explored in depth as the current analysis unfolds.

Language actually contributes very much to the Great Whore's delineation. To stress that even better, there is the close parallel construction of the textual introduction of the Whore and the Bride of the Lamb, as well as the contrast in clothes colouring and the further associations.

Lynn Huber revolves on the well-established contrast and chooses to emphasize the Bride over the Whore, as depicted in Roman social discourse. In her studies, ³⁸² she develops the wedding imagery, as depicted with the prophets of the OT (mainly Ezekiel 16, Hosea 1-2, Isa 61:10) ³⁸³ and also shaped by Graeco-Roman metaphors and myths in maintaining traditional gender roles.

Therefore, in idealizing the Bride, John develops an anti-Roman perspective, "heretofore directed at political, economic, and religious elements of the Empire, to Roman social discourse as well" with the help of the Whore image, i.e. Rome, showing a far from ideal picture than what is propagated in the Roman empire, namely "a sexually promiscuous woman and the 'mother of prostitutes' (17:5)." ³⁸⁴

Huber uses the conceptual metaphor theory, however with reference to the imagery of the Bride in her book "Like a Bride Adorned: Reading Metaphor in John's Apocalypse". If one desires to understand the metaphoric language behind the above mentioned imagery adequately, full weight should be given to the associations evoked by the "source domain"—which, in the case of Rev 17, would be the all too familiar figure of the brothel worker in the Roman society. ³⁸⁵

Eva Maria Räßle belongs to the proponents, who view the metaphorical language of the Apocalypse as the missing link with the visual arts. The very nature of language as dialogical

³⁸¹ Edith M. Humphrey, *A Tale of Two Cities and (At Least) Three Women. Transformation, Continuity and Contrast in the Apocalypse*, in: David L. Barr (ed.), *Reading the Book of Revelation. A Resource for Students* (Society for Biblical Literature 44: Resources for Biblical Studies), Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2003, 81-96, 84.

³⁸² Cf. Lynn R. Huber, *Unveiling the Bride: Revelation 19.1-8 and the Roman Social Discourse*, in: Amy-Jill Levine, Maria Mayo Robbins (eds.), *A Feminist Companion to John's Apocalypse*, 159-179.

³⁸³ Brenner, *Pornoprophetics*, 63. cf. Doyle, *The Apocalypse of Isaiah Metaphorically Speaking*, 227.

³⁸⁴ Huber, *Unveiling the Bride*, 172.

³⁸⁵ See Huber, *Like a Bride Adorned*. This is also valid for the understanding of the 144,000 male virgins; also cf. eadem, *Sexually Explicit? Re-reading Revelation's 144,000 Virgins as a Response to Roman Discourses*, in: *Journal of Men, Masculinities and Spirituality* 2/2008, 3-28.

provoking “playful creativity” and participation on the behalf of the reader/audience³⁸⁶ puts a strain on the interpreter, whose imagination is crucial in the interpretation of symbolic images. Because the Apocalypse is full with metaphorical language, a literal reading and understanding of it would cause nothing but obstacles for the reader/interpreter.³⁸⁷

The reader’s role is crucial for acquiring meaning.

The image of the city as a metaphor is essentially “an image designed to incite the senses”,³⁸⁸ for “the female characters in the Apocalypse effectively stimulate a ‘feeling mind’”.³⁸⁹ Räßple acknowledges the importance of a heightened awareness of with any Biblical interpretation of the imaginative visualization and thought, which primarily stem from the readers’ active response to the text. It is for this reason that the audience of Apocalypse is encouraged to construct their identity just as the ‘Bride’ enters into a new relationship to the Lamb.

Acknowledging the two-dimensionality of the metaphor, respectively the political and the human, Räßple concedes that the latter “consciously or unconsciously ensures emotional appeal [...] affective responses to the text [...] incites imagination and evokes the response of reader/audience”.³⁹⁰

According to Räßple, there might be a usable future for the complex composition of the metaphor of the woman-city in the Apocalypse, provided we consider the aspect of the city-woman as community.³⁹¹

Like her predecessors, she channels the focus on the political character rather, using gender to construct various realities of readers, either pertaining to the covenantal relationship to God,³⁹² expressing utter sinfulness,³⁹³ or aiding at the appropriation of an abstract image, such as the city, by its communal associations.³⁹⁴

In virtue of the latter associations, the ontological level is touched upon, as the “metaphor, city community comes alive, receives a human body, identity and human face.”³⁹⁵

³⁸⁶ Räßple, *The Metaphor of the City*, 27.

³⁸⁷ Räßple, *The Metaphor of the City*, 30.

³⁸⁸ Räßple, *The Metaphor of the City*, 87.

³⁸⁹ Räßple, *The Metaphor of the City*, 137.

³⁹⁰ Räßple, *The Metaphor of the City*, 87.

³⁹¹ Räßple, *The Metaphor of the City*, 127ff.

³⁹² Räßple, *The Metaphor of the City*, 88.

³⁹³ Räßple, *The Metaphor of the City*, 158.

³⁹⁴ Räßple, *The Metaphor of the City*, 89.

³⁹⁵ Räßple, *The Metaphor of the City*, 89.

Insisting on the more existential approach, I could add that “sexuality, especially in Biblical tradition has always been an essential metaphor that refers to humanity centered in a relation between God and human being as well as human beings among each other.”³⁹⁶

Part of the visual character of the vision of the Great Whore in Apocalypse 17, assigning the Whore moral values is also encountered in the rhetographical images in the Apocalypse.

More literary examples include Toril Moi’s understanding of the Whore as situated at the limit of symbolic order. Subsequently, such a depiction would construe women at the limit between man and chaos, remaining always marginal either in the vilification of women or in their exaltation by the male culture.³⁹⁷

At the opposite pole in the literary spectrum lie the literal interpretations of the Great Whore as per Tina Pippin’s view.

Pippin is attempting at a carnal interpretation of the Whore of Rev 17. Her reading is ahistorical, reflecting “postmodern sensibilities that recognize that texts are not generally susceptible to an interpretative ‘answer’, but rather evoke ‘readings’ from specific readers with their own unique interests and commitments” conceived in this case “to resist misogyny”.³⁹⁸

The women’s interest stems from the identification with the images presented, so argue the feminists who legitimize the removing of the context for the proper understanding of the text in question, when attempting a contemporary gender analysis.³⁹⁹ Such identification is performed in the process of the reading the Apocalypse and is a part of the readers’ response. As a result, the character of the Whore is drawn ideologically and theologically and marked with explicit sexual signifiers, among which practicing immorality and beguiling the community are only some examples. Because it implies the identification with a male perspective and rejoicing over the judgment of the whore (Rev 18:20, 19:2), the text alienates the female readers⁴⁰⁰, being nothing but a ‘pornoapocalypse’⁴⁰¹ and displaying misogynist view.

³⁹⁶ Räßle, *The Metaphor of the City*, 198.

³⁹⁷ Toril Moi, *Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory*, London and New York: Routledge, 1985, 166-167.

³⁹⁸ Brook and Gwyther, *Unveiling Empire*, 43.

³⁹⁹ Cf. references to Stenström, Pippin, Selvidge mentioned in the bibliographical list.

⁴⁰⁰ Pamela Thimmes, Teaching and Beguiling My Servants. The Letter to Thyatira (Rev 2.18-29), in: Amy-Jill Levine, Maria Mayo Robbins (eds.), *A Feminist Companion to the Apocalypse of John*, 69-87, 74.

⁴⁰¹ Tina Pippin, *Apocalyptic Bodies, The Biblical End of the World in Text and Image*, London/New York: Routledge, 1999, 92. This view is also shared by Selvidge, cf. eadem, Reflections on Violence and Pornography.

Tina Pippin vehemently criticizes the negative depictions of not only the Prostitute, but also the gendered apocalyptic imagery as a whole, prompting thus a severe marginalization of women, materialized in misogynistic language as well as violence towards them. "Reading for the 'lives' of the females in the text exposes the deep misogyny of the vision of the end of the world".⁴⁰²

Pippin reads through the glasses of the gender ideology concluding that the killing of the Prostitute is not entirely liberating, for it reverberates in an expression of war and patriarchy.⁴⁰³

Although she agrees to an extent on the cathartic⁴⁰⁴ character of the above mentioned episode, her view is different as expressed in the autobiographical voice: "*Having studied the evils of Roman imperial policy in the colonies I find the violent destruction of Babylon very cathartic. But when I looked into the face of Babylon, I saw a woman.*"⁴⁰⁵

The latter observation stands in opposition to Adela Yarbro Collins', who interprets Babylon's fall as vindictive, cathartic and an outlet for the anger of those in perceived crisis.⁴⁰⁶

Given the misogynistic character of the Apocalypse, Pippin sees neither a usable past, nor future for the women of the Apocalypse, for they are at least textually completely excluded from the New Jerusalem.⁴⁰⁷

For Tina Pippin, the Apocalypse can be evaluated in a manner in which the imposition of the prostitute identity (...) is a misguided patriarchal projection of male phantasy.⁴⁰⁸ "The Bride is adorned, in contrast to the stripping and burning of the Whore. The marriage of the Bride counters the death/funeral of the Whore."⁴⁰⁹

Also, the problem with these types of feminist depictions is their overfocus on 'words', on literality. In this manner, they overlook the fact that metaphors are not simple words, but operate as speech acts in which the author employs a metaphorical phrasing to reach a

⁴⁰² Pippin, *Death and Desire*, 47.

⁴⁰³ Cf. Tina Pippin, The Heroine and the Whore. Fantasy and the Female in the Apocalypse of John, in: *Semeia*, 60/1992, 67-82.

⁴⁰⁴ Both Pippin and in the following Yarbro Collins take the formulation from Aristotle's Poetics, namely from the definition of tragedy as "tempering suffering by means of mercy and fear and effecting purification of those who suffer" (Leonardo, Tarán Gutas Dimitri (eds.), Aristotle, *Poetics*. Editio maior. (Mnemosyne: Monographs on Greek and Roman Language and Literature, Supplementum 338), Leiden: Brill, 2012, 122, also cf. the Greek text, pgs. 166-219).

⁴⁰⁵ Pippin, *Death and Desire*, 80; cf. eadem, Pippin, The Revelation to John, 119 (verbatim phrasing).

⁴⁰⁶ Cf. Adela Yarbro Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis: The Power of the Apocalypse*, Philadelphia: Westminster, 1984.

⁴⁰⁷ Pippin, *Death and Desire*, 16.

⁴⁰⁸ Clifford, *Introducing Feminist Theology*, 78.

⁴⁰⁹ Pippin, The Revelation to John, 118-119.

particular end, namely that of conveying the 'speaker's meaning' to the audience.⁴¹⁰ Words function together in forming an image complex⁴¹¹, therefore, these should not be read in isolation.

Similarly, with Marla Selvidge's formulation, the Great Harlot's destruction is assessed as a "gang-rape" and "gang-murder" as a result to the Seer's jealousy of the powerful position of the woman.⁴¹²

The image of the Whore is the motif arduously discussed with the feminist theologians.

It may still be considered, simultaneously, an oppressive text, legitimating sexual violence of all sorts⁴¹³ and/or pornography⁴¹⁴ in other contexts and communities (e.g. feminist anti-pornography activists in Europe, or contexts in the so-called Third World where women's rights activists work against trafficking and sex tourism).⁴¹⁵

Sociological Readings of the Great Whore

The article by Hanna Roose⁴¹⁶ deals with the visually and auditory spectacular mise-en-scène of the fall of the Great Harlot. An iconographic approach defines images in terms of 'reality constructs', enlightening on "how prostitution was perceived in Asia Minor in John's days and if this perception can add new facets to the interpretation of Revelation 18."⁴¹⁷ She argues that Rev 18 is based on an ancient stereotype from everyday life regarding old prostitutes, "i.e. prostitutes that have lost their sexual attraction and have therefore been

⁴¹⁰ Cf. Macky, *The Centrality of Metaphors*, 8-25.

⁴¹¹ Cf. the terminology of Ulrike Sals also refers to Rev 17-19 as to a 'Bildkomplex' in: Sals, *Die Biographie*, 52.

⁴¹² Selvidge, *Reflections on Violence and Pornography*, 281f.

⁴¹³ Cf. Stenström, *The Book of Revelation. A Vision of the Ultimate Liberation or the Ultimate Backlash?*, 24: "The spectrum includes sexual harassment, rape, child abuse, pornography, prostitution, battering, mental abuse within intimate relationships".

⁴¹⁴ For a list of feminist studies in this area, cf. Stenström, *The Book of Revelation. A Vision of the Ultimate Liberation or the Ultimate Backlash?*, 25, ft. 84.

⁴¹⁵ Hanna Stenström, Is a liberating feminist exegesis possible without liberation theology?, retrieved at <http://www.iiv.nl/eazines/web/LectioDifficilior/2002/No1/No1/stenstroem.pdf> (no pagination), (15.03.2012).

⁴¹⁶ Hanna Roose, The Fall of the 'Great Harlot' and the Fate of the Aging Prostitute. An Iconographic Approach to Revelation 18 in: Annette Weissenrieder, Friederike Wendt and Petra von Gemünden (eds.), *Picturing the New Testament. Studies in Ancient Visual Images* (Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen Zum Neuen Testament II 193), Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005, 228-252.

⁴¹⁷ Roose, The Fall of the 'Great Harlot' and the Fate of the Aging Prostitute, 231.

pushed ‘out of business’”⁴¹⁸ as reflected in texts and visually depicted in statues. As a result, John reinterprets the above mentioned idealized stereotype also linking it with the OT understanding on judgment anchored in the Apocalypse’s rhetorical strategy revolving around ‘one day’ (18:8) and ‘one hour’ (18:10.17.19).⁴¹⁹

As a result, John envisions a reversal of roles, that would impose after the Fall, the originally ‘outsiders’ upon kings, merchants and ship-owners.

Similarly, Jennifer A. Glancy and Stephen D. Moore look into the aspect of the social realities in John’s time and adduce historical relevant data of prostitutes in the Roman Empire in an attempt to better delineate the appellative πόρνῃ, which John so frequently conjoins with Babylon. By doing this, they go against the more bookish interpretations of the Prostitute, offered by some of the Biblical scholars, who account for the existence of such an appellative, due to the mostly literary connections with the OT, or other political or literary convention of the day. “It seems reasonable to us to suppose that the term would have conjured up first and foremost in the midst of the urban Christians addressed in the Revelation a certain category of flesh and blood person that one encountered with considerable frequency in the streets, a fixture of the urban landscape, as opposed to a figure of high literature, or a literary, or philosophical *topos*, or a scriptural type.”⁴²⁰

The latter understanding draws principally from the prophetic material in the Hebrew Bible,⁴²¹ although as Glancy and Moore conclude “we suspect that she (i.e. Elizabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza) imputes an overly cerebral experience of the πόρνῃ metaphor to the original audiences, who coolly process it as a “figure of speech” principally drawn from “the prophetic language of the Hebrew Bible”.⁴²²

An analysis grounded in the contemporary realities is more consistent with the orientations of postmodern feminist theory.

As the interest regarding the corporeality of the imagery of the Great Whore increases, some consider the text offensive due to the calling of a woman *prostitute*, others perceive it offensive due to the abusive use of the whore identity.⁴²³

Caroline Vander Stichele interprets the image of the Great Whore from the perspective of the socio-economic realities in the Netherlands,⁴²⁴ especially with reference to the lives of

⁴¹⁸ Roose, The Fall of the ‘Great Harlot’ and the Fate of the Aging Prostitute, 232.

⁴¹⁹ Roose, The Fall of the ‘Great Harlot’ and the Fate of the Aging Prostitute, 248.

⁴²⁰ Glancy and Moore, How Typical a Roman Prostitute, 557.

⁴²¹ Schüssler-Fiorenza, *Justice and Judgment*, 220.

⁴²² Cf. Glancy and Moore, How Typical a Roman Prostitute, 551-569.

⁴²³ Ipsen, *Sex Working and the Bible*, 169.

⁴²⁴ Vander Stichele, Just a Whore, also cf. eadem, Re-memembering the Whore, 106-121.

the real prostitutes in the Red Light District. She argues against the city dimension, identified primarily in the metaphor of the Great Whore, since such fact is an attempt much too frequently employed in order to explain away⁴²⁵ and therefore neglect, if not overlook all the gender implications of such a metaphor.

Vander Stichele also elaborates on offensive language and she argues that within a patriarchal society,⁴²⁶ to compare the enemy to a woman is a means of ridiculing and denigrating him on the one hand, and of ascertaining one's own male superiority on the other.

Relating to lives of real prostitutes is also the analysis of Avaren Ipsen, an activist for sex workers as well as Biblical scholar.

Her book *Sex Working and the Bible*⁴²⁷ aims to empower the marginalized readers of the Bible to take attitude with reference to the Biblical texts evaluating negatively the profession of sex working. She is convinced of the ideological contextual character informing our reading perspective, therefore blends Biblical stories on real prostitutes with pastoral concerns. Her contribution furnishes a valuable insight on the manner in which whores are perceived in the 21st century environment of United States.

The apocalyptic vision of the Great Whore (17:1-19:10) is examined against the background of violence addressing the sex workers, as part of other Biblical stories involving prostitutes, namely Rahab (Joshua 2 and Joshua 6:22-25), Solomon and prostitutes (1Kgs 3:16-28), the woman who anointed Jesus in Mark 14:3-9, Luke 7:36-50, Matthew 26:6-13, John 12:1-8.

As a result, the negative feminine imagery of the Revelation points to a "sexualized violence against women" which "is one of John's primary modes of depicting God's judgment."⁴²⁸ It is thus obvious how certain readings have developed a dangerous potential.

Additionally, her analysis has postcolonial undertones, where violence features in a context delineated by domination, exploitation as well as a strong ideology of power. John's Apocalypse sets sexualized violence as integral to the Seer's "anti-colonial, or more accurately anti-Roman cry for justice and to his vision of an immolated Lamb who with his own blood will purchase the oppressed for God."⁴²⁹

⁴²⁵ Cf. Vander Stichele, *Just a Whore*.

⁴²⁶ Vander Stichele, *Re-memembering the Whore*, 114.

⁴²⁷ Avaren Ipsen, *Sex Working and the Bible*, London: Equinox Publishing Ltd, 2009.

⁴²⁸ John W. Marshall, *Gender and Empire, Sexualized Violence in John's Anti-Imperial Apocalypse*, in: Amy-Jill Levine with Maya Robbins (eds.) *A Feminist Companion to the Apocalypse of John*, London, New York, 2009: T&T Clark International, 17-32, 19.

⁴²⁹ Marshall, *Gender and Empire*, 32.

Ipsen is interested in the evaluation and possible liberation from destructive functions of the language of 'whore' in its historical context, as well as today. She does so by voicing the muted voices of sex workers. Ipsen attempts to analyze the slander word as an ambiguous type of parody, not necessarily directed to Rome, but possibly to actual prostitutes, as part of John's community.⁴³⁰

The offensive language is quite possibly an effective rhetorical strategy designed to provoke important necessary realizations. The symmetry with regard to Revelation's control of the Whore Babylon and the accounts of violence conducted against prostitutes, on the one hand, on the other, the 'whore rhetoric' exists as legitimizing rape, as well as domestic violence in the exhortation 'kill the whore'.⁴³¹

Mythological Focus

The tendency towards an abstractization of the Whore-image was very well addressed in the analysis of its mythical character as goddess Roma, another dimension of the personification of Rome.

There are numerous scholars,⁴³² either historians of religions themselves or inspired by the history of religion, who have explored this dimension in depth.

Adela Yarbro Collins marches on the historical identification of the Whore of Rev 17 with Rome, writing that "in Revelation, idolatry is focused on a goddess, Roma."⁴³³

However, she elaborates on the mythical character of the Great Whore. Off all her appellative, she especially focuses on her maternal character.

As a result, the mother-Whore of Apocalypse 17 develops the myth of the Great Mother⁴³⁴, who hides the two sides of one character: "the good mother, who nourishes and lavishes

⁴³⁰ Her approach to Scripture is inspired by life in American ghettos. Her discussions with the sex workers in her study resonate well with the offensive terminology found in the hip-hop music.

⁴³¹ Ipsen, *Sex Working and the Bible*, 197.

⁴³² E.g. A chronological overview would include Gunkel, *Schöpfung und Chaos*; Wilhelm Bousset, *Die Offenbarung Johannis*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1906; Franz Boll, *Aus der Offenbarung Johannis: Hellenistische Studien zum Weltbild der Apokalypse*, Amsterdam: Hakkert, 1964; Yarbro Collins, *The Combat Myth*; Bruce J. Malina, *On the Genre and Message of the Revelation: Star Visions and Sky Journeys*, Peabody: Hendrickson, 1995; Jacques M. Chevalier, *A Postmodern Revelation: Signs of Astrology and the Apocalypse*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997.

⁴³³ Adela Yarbro Collins, *Insiders and Outsiders in the Book of Revelation and Its Social Context*, in: Jacob Neusner and Ernest S. Frerichs (eds.), *To See Ourselves As Others See Us: Jews, Christians, "Others" in Late Antiquity* (Studies in the Humanities), Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1985, 187-218, 214. Also, eadem, *Feminine Symbolism in the Book of Revelation* b, 121.

affection, and she is also the wicked mother who devours and destroys.”⁴³⁵ No matter how appalling it may be, at least from a gender perspective, the Great Whore of chapter 17 is the only textually mentioned mother –μήτηρ of the Apocalypse.

This ambiguity is not found only in the figure of the Prostitute but also features in the entire spectrum of gendered manifestations of the feminine imagery in the Apocalypse.⁴³⁶

Signalling a departure from the historical character of Apocalypse to a symbolic one, the focus thus changes from historical to mythical thinking and concepts.

The Great Whore could also allude to a metaphorical compositional complex figure inspired from the mythical figure of the Queen Ruler.⁴³⁷ She has along with other queens (Queen Mother, Queen Consort, and Queen Jezebel) a mythic character, playing on a variant of the chaos monster Tiamat –the mother who would destroy her children and who is herself destroyed.⁴³⁸ Nevertheless, a political intent of the imagery is almost always depicted in these struggles for power and control.

Other sources note “the ancient Near Eastern understanding of goddess as protectors of particular peoples or cities, [...] often called the Fortune of the city,”⁴³⁹ rooted in the widespread⁴⁴⁰ practice of deities taking consorts.⁴⁴¹ Because every city had a patron, his

⁴³⁴“The great prostitute of chapter 17 is the Terrible Mother. Her character as a prostitute symbolizes the seductive and charming power of the Great Mother’s lure toward self-dissolution in the unconscious sea of participation, of non-individuation”. (Yarbro Collins, *Feminine Symbolism in the Book of Revelation* a, 30; Cf. for an identical phrasing, eadem, *Feminine Symbolism in the Book of Revelation* b, 128).

⁴³⁵ Yarbro Collins, *Feminine Symbolism in the Book of Revelation* b, 127.

⁴³⁶ Yarbro Collins, *Feminine Symbolism in the Book of Revelation* b, 130.

⁴³⁷ Barr, *Women in Myth and History*, 58.

⁴³⁸ Amy Jill-Levine, Introduction, in: Amy-Jill Levine, Maria Mayo Robbins (eds.), *A Feminist Companion to the Apocalypse of John*, 1-16, 4.

⁴³⁹ Yarbro Collins, *Feminine Symbolism in the Book of Revelation* b, 125.

The cult of the goddess Roma probably achieved popularity due to its practicality: its permanency was ensued despite the Roman officers and magistrates who changed frequently. However, the cult of the city goddess was officially admitted to Rome only in A.D. 118, by Hadrian dedicating a temple to Venus and Roma (Court, *Myth and History*, 149).

⁴⁴⁰ Zimmermann, *Geschlechtermetaphorik und Gottesverhältnis*, 405. Cf. Huber, *Like a Bride Adorned*, 93.

⁴⁴¹ Moughtin-Mumby, *Sexual and Marital Metaphors*, 8 ft. 28 and ft.29. She mentions a series of authors supporting such claims, among whom A. Fitzgerald, *The Mythological Background for the Presentation of Jerusalem as a Queen and False Worship as Adultery in the Old Testament*, in: *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 34/1972, 403-416, idem, *Btwlt and bt as Titles for Capital Cities*, in: *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 37/1975, 167-173, M. E. Biddle, *The Figure of Lady Jerusalem. Identification, Deification and Personification of Cities in the Ancient Near East*, in: K.L. Youngers Jr., B. F. Batto, W. W. Hallo (eds.), *The Biblical Canon in Comparative*

consort was usually envisioned as feminine. The Μεγάλη Τύχη (deified city) tradition is also acknowledged by other scholars⁴⁴² and attested throughout the Empire on coins.

The main distinction that Judaism records is that female city personifications are namely never goddesses and have almost always a negative image.⁴⁴³ This commonplace shifts from a deification tendency found amongst Israel's neighbours towards a theological understanding of this phenomenon.

Rhetographical Focus

This refers to feminine images, building on the dichotomic apocalyptic worldview and using rhetography as analytical lens. In the *Feminist Companion to John's Apocalypse*, Greg Carey delves into *rhetography*, which he defines as "the rhetoric of the senses, to dramatize the difference one woman and another", exploring the different "*kinds* of wealth –what can be touched, tasted, sounded, and smelled" as conventional depictions of gender in Mediterranean Antiquity.⁴⁴⁴ Images of women are used as vehicles, because they are "more influenced by their senses than their intellect and thus open to evil influence through external stimulation."⁴⁴⁵

Apocalypse uses various images of wealth to differentiate between contrasting feminine characters, representing wealth associated with the Beast and wealth associated with the Lamb.⁴⁴⁶

Carey develops his analysis within the well-known contrast scheme between the decadent Whore and the modest Bride. Within the parametres set by the sensory rhetoric, vibrant colours (Apocalypse 17), jewelry (Apocalypse 17), rich tastes and odours (cf. the cargo list in Apocalypse 18), melodic sounds (Apocalypse 18) which are describing the Whore's domain are contrasted with the modesty and white linen clothes of the Bride. Whereas

Perspective, also Galambush, *Jerusalem in the Book of Ezekiel*, 20f drawing actually on previous works mentioned by Fitzgerald.

⁴⁴² Among others cf. Ruben Zimmermann, *Geschlechtermetaphorik und Gottesverhältnis: Traditionsgeschichte und Theologie eines Bildfelds in Urchristentum und antiker Umwelt* (Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen Zum Neuen Testament, II 122), Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001, 405; cf. Sals, *Die Biographie*, 2004.

⁴⁴³ Galambush, *Jerusalem in the Book of Ezekiel*, 26.

⁴⁴⁴ Greg Carey, A Man's Choice: Wealth Imagery and the Two Cities of the Book of Revelation, in: Amy-Jill Levine, Maria Mayo Robbins (eds.), *A Feminist Companion to John's Apocalypse*, 2009, 147-158, 147.

⁴⁴⁵ Carey, A Man's Choice, 147.

⁴⁴⁶ Carey, A Man's Choice, 147.

Babylon is the “decadent, sensually coded woman”, New Jerusalem is “a modest virgin prepared for her wedding day.”⁴⁴⁷

This presentation is construed as favouring ascetic aesthetics, namely “the abstract and pure bride over the more specific and sensual Whore.”⁴⁴⁸

Indeed sensual imageries arising from the description of clothes and jewelry “are customarily employed by the authors to add to the sensual depiction of their characters, especially in the scenes of the banquet and feast which have a transformative function between death and restoration.” The aim of such descriptions of terrifying female imagery is “to expose male desire by revealing the voyeuristic male as subject to seductive female powers.”⁴⁴⁹

Considering the male audience of the Apocalypse, Carey concludes that the choice in the Apocalypse essentially implies “men choice between a woman of substance and agency and a woman reduced to passive ideal.”⁴⁵⁰ This ‘choice’ between the two feminine depictions is actually perceived as “fulcrum for feminist ethical assessment.”⁴⁵¹

Moreover, when it comes to the political implications of such choice, the contrastive scheme encompassing the two gendered images reinforces the righteousness of choice of ascetics. The result is that the text devalues anything related to Imperial Rome, for transience is definitory of this choice.

The main limitation which a gender-informed reading brings about is that no matter how much we would read into the female images, be they real or fictional, allegorical or metaphorical, one thing is clear, namely that these images are limiting and limited linguistic constructs⁴⁵² and the women are stereotypically depicted (as mothers, whores, brides) in a binary honour-shame system.⁴⁵³

Since the feminist interpretation acknowledges the value of the historical-critical method overall, it is limited in accounting for some of the images of the Apocalypse, and as a result, they cannot be explicated *by* and *for* modern readers.

⁴⁴⁷ Carey, *A Man’s Choice*, 148.

⁴⁴⁸ Carey, *A Man’s Choice*, 149.

⁴⁴⁹ Kim, *Uncovering her Wickedness*, 75.

⁴⁵⁰ Carey, *A Man’s Choice*, 158. Kim, *Uncovering her Wickedness*, 75.

⁴⁵¹ Carey, *A Man’s Choice*, 150.

⁴⁵² Yarbrow Collins, *Feminine Symbolism in the Book of Revelation* b, 130.

⁴⁵³ Cf. Hanna Stenström, *Feminist Research for a Usable Future: Feminist Reception of the Book of Revelation*, in: William J. Lyons, Økland, Jorunn (eds.), *The Way the World Ends? The Apocalypse of John in Culture and Ideology* (Bible in the Modern World 19), Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2009, 240-266.

The feminist perspective intervenes in this context and adduces its contribution to the field. The Great Whore of Babylon is subsequently an image abundant with textual, social and visual relevance.

The Great Whore as constitutive to Slander Discourse

A very interesting example is the slander discourse as per Jennifer Knust's perspective. With the image of the Great Whore, John employs a persuasive strategy with the function to "persuade his listeners, influence the values they maintained, promote certain courses of action and 'incite a verdict of innocence or guilt' on the societal situation of his readers."⁴⁵⁴

This persuasive strategy could be labelled as *rhetorical* and it entails the literary devices designed to get the reader to respond to a text in a certain way.⁴⁵⁵

Apart from the necessity to include cultural context as a type of shared knowledge, gender is a mere corollary to sex discourse, being used as rhetorical trope to defame enemies of Christianity. In light of these, the polarity that is ensued encompasses moral categories of 'good' and 'bad'. However, "'good' and 'bad' sexual behavior is not given, natural and obvious; these categories are produced and enacted within history."⁴⁵⁶

Power and *status* are under main criticism, as targets of rhetorical writings: "Charges of debauchery, unrestrained lust, and the like illuminate cultural assertions about sex and morality, while providing evidence of competitive power relations between individuals and the groups they claim to represent."⁴⁵⁷

Regarding the vision of the Great Whore in Apocalypse 17, the application of certain cultural stereotypes with regard to the perception of both males and females could be relevant.

Demonization of female sexuality, by appealing to the jargon of sexual immorality is highlighted in πόρν- cognates: ἡ πόρνη (17:2.5.15.16; 18:3.9), πορνεύω (17:2.18:3.9) and πορνεία (17:2.4; 18:3; 19:2).

⁴⁵⁴ Diehl, 'Babylon': Then, Now, and 'Not Yet', 182 quoting David Arthur DeSilva, *Seeing Things John's Way: The Rhetoric of the Book of Revelation*, Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009, 18.

⁴⁵⁵ Cf. John F. A. Sawyer, *The Role of Reception Theory, Reader-Response Criticism and/or Impact History in the Study of Bible: Definition and Evaluation*, (no pagination), available at <http://bbibcomm.net/files/sawyer2004.pdf> (last accessed, 15.09.2013).

⁴⁵⁶ Knust, *Abandoned to Lust*, 3.

⁴⁵⁷ Knust, *Abandoned to Lust*, 3.

*"If a woman was accused of sexual licentiousness, she was also likely to be accused of excessive adornment and concern for her appearance", among others, "she adorns herself with expensive, ostentatious clothing, perfumes and cosmetics; her passions are insatiable; she seeks unlawful intercourse with whomever she can, wherever she can [...]."*⁴⁵⁸

Starting with associated cultural stereotypes, the rhetorical purpose would be that John is simply continuing the along the lines of the tradition that "Christian authors frequently defined themselves against outsiders in sexual terms"⁴⁵⁹, thus highlighting "their own virtue against the vice of others, including Roman emperors, Roman citizens, and Roman governors."⁴⁶⁰ In other words, "the insistence that (true) Christians are sexually pure pervades this literature."⁴⁶¹

Subsequently, faith in Christ and temperance and self-restraint contained in the word σωφροσύνη are utterly incompatible with the above-described practices.

In another order of ideas, as per the depiction of the Great Whore in the Apocalypse, sex has a *propagandistic* function. "Propaganda is a transaction of verbal (rhetorical) communication designed by its initiator(s) to persuade the recipients of communication to accept its message."⁴⁶²

Reading the techniques and devices advanced by Athalya Brenner when reading prophetic texts, I regard them to be valid for the text of the Apocalypse. Among these,⁴⁶³ *use of stereotypes* such as the ones mentioned above (whore, mother, woman), the *name calling and name substitution* (whore, Babylon, mother of harlots), as well as their *repetition* and *promotion* are aiding in the persuasion process.

Evidencing only the male's perspective in the narrative –by appeal to the *authority* conferred by God⁴⁶⁴ –encompass the criteria of *selection* and *exaggeration and (possibly) lying*. In John's account, the Great Whore is thus modeled as *anti-hero*.

David Aune⁴⁶⁵ identifies the courtesan topos in the depiction of the Great Whore.

⁴⁵⁸ Knust, *Abandoned to Lust*, 38.

⁴⁵⁹ Knust, *Abandoned to Lust*, 114.

⁴⁶⁰ Knust, *Abandoned to Lust*, 50.

⁴⁶¹ Knust, *Abandoned to Lust*, 8.

⁴⁶² Athalya Brenner, *Pornoprophetics Revisited: Some Additional Reflections*, in: *Journal for the Study of Old Testament* 70/ 1996, 63-86, 66.

⁴⁶³ Brenner, *Pornoprophetics*, especially 66-68.

⁴⁶⁴ Brenner, *Pornoprophetics*, 68.

⁴⁶⁵ Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 935.

Certain commonplaces in meretricious display of the Prostitute employed by the moralist writers,⁴⁶⁶ revolve on various personifications of vices (incontinence, profligacy, covetousness, flattery), as well as on a particular way of dressing, quality of clothing, jewelry.

Attire and adornment help shape an identity, for they provide information, delineate, respectively aid the enhancement of one's external bodily persona, as the Whore is most certainly eye-catching in terms of display. If only we record the Seer's reaction to this vision in v. 6a, these have no other role, but to assign an "erotic capital" onto the Whore's body. Additionally, parallelism with the vv. 1-6 of Apocalypse 17 is provided by Swete,⁴⁶⁷ Rossing,⁴⁶⁸ Aune,⁴⁶⁹ who point out a text similar –Cebes Tabula 5.1-3 about a beautiful woman named Deceit (Ἀπάτη), seated on a throne, while holding a cup from which people, who drink are lead astray. Her drink is called "distraction" and "ignorance".⁴⁷⁰ In view of the traits presented earlier, Ἀπάτη shares great similarity with the Great Whore, in what regard posture, attire, drinking, as well as chief-activity.

One can easily notice from the above, that Jennifer Knust's discourse has very much in common with Aune's observations concerning the functions of the ancient *topos* of the prostitute, as well as with Barbara Rossing's literary approach of the *topos* of the evil woman.

However, unlike Knust, only Rossing refers to the political implications of such literary tropes, for the former also includes denigrations "within a tradition of representation in which women could figure as signifiers in discussions about men and the larger society".⁴⁷¹ Nevertheless, the manner in which Knust directs the critique to men resembles Kim's⁴⁷² for she argues that all the shortcomings of society, including the discourse on whores are to be blamed upon men unable to reserve the honour of a household,⁴⁷³ thus contributing to the idea of a shared blame.

⁴⁶⁶ The ancient writers and moralists, such as Porphyry, *De Antro Nympharum* 14; Cebes, *Tabula* 9.1-4; Lucian, *Dialogues of the Courtesans*, 286, 294-297, 321, *Piscator* 12; Alciphron, *Letters of the Courtesans* 9.1, 12.2, 17.5), Juvenal, *Satires*, vi.122f dealt with the specifics of the courtesan's cosmos.

⁴⁶⁷ Swete, *Commentary on Revelation*, 216.

⁴⁶⁸ Rossing, *The Choice*, 77.

⁴⁶⁹ Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 938.

⁴⁷⁰ Cf. *Cebes in England. English Translations of the Tablet of Cebes from Three Centuries with Related Materials*. Edited with Introductory Notes by Stephen Orgel (The Philosophy of Images), New York/London: Garland Publishing Inc., 1980, 66-67. Also, Swete, *Commentary on Revelation*, 216; Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 936; Prigent, *Commentary on the Apocalypse of St. John*, 488 (f.13), Rossing, *The Choice*, 80f.

⁴⁷¹ Knust, *Abandoned to Lust*, 39.

⁴⁷² Cf. Kim, *Uncovering her Wickedness*.

⁴⁷³ Knust, *Abandoned to Lust*, 41.

In the same rhetorical framework of belittling one's enemy, Aune and Vander Stichele explain that the depiction of the enemy as a woman was a means of denigrating him, belonging of the 'second' sex, and thus ascertaining one's male superiority on the denigrated one.⁴⁷⁴

In other words, "Greeks conceived of the various kings of Babylon as effeminate people who lived like women, wore dresses, makeup and jewels and were therefore regarded negatively as examples of unmanly behaviour".⁴⁷⁵

The purpose of such creation is to raise aversion and thus solidarity among the members of an audience.⁴⁷⁶

Assessment

In particular, the description of the Great Whore in Apocalypse 17 is generically classified as 'apocalypse'. It occurs in form of a vision, in which occurs mediated communication between a divine emissary and a Seer. The feminist focus is evidenced however, not with the Seer, or the *angelus interpretes*, but with the manner in which the gendered character embodying the Great Whore operates at the level of the Apocalypse. The textual composition of the character and its function within the larger frame of the vision are the main coordinates of the current gender-informed endeavour.

Because generic interpretation brings ever so deepening aspects in a text, I appreciate in this way the openness and indeterminacy of language just as any feminist exegetical endeavour.

Nevertheless, just because the approach undertaken is subsumed by nature to a postmodern perspective, it does not mean that this scriptural passage "means practically everything or anything, and that it evokes the most peculiar ideas".⁴⁷⁷

Still, the propensity of the analysis is literary, even if social, political, cultural, and visual aspects will be included.

By 'literary', I understand the fact that the vision of chapter 17 is indeed a text transmitting a message, which is actualized by the interpretative effort of the readers, having the feminist outlook as analytic glasses.

⁴⁷⁴ Vander Stichele, *Re-memembering the Whore*, 114.

⁴⁷⁵ Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 937.

⁴⁷⁶ Brenner, *Pornoprophetics*, 67.

⁴⁷⁷ Krzystof Sonek, *Truth, Beauty and Goodness in Biblical Narratives. A Hermeneutical Study of Genesis 21:1-21*, Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2009, 132.

All these mentioned, I insist however on reading the vision of the Great Whore as 'apocalypse'.

Although the interest solely and exclusively in the figure of the Whore itself is limited from a gendered perspective, there are studies larger in scope, that deal with the various aspects of the gendered metaphor.

Because of the different approaches of the current theme, sometimes such interpretations, part of the history of effects (*Wirkungsgeschichte*) that the current text had, are contrasting and competing with each other. Out of these interpretations, I focus only on those which have a gender-related character and subsequently establish in academic field in the 20th century, as well as in recent years.

Due to the growing interest of interdisciplinary studies within the gender-informed field, interpretations vary according to how much the theological message is immersed in other research fields. The degree of involvement with other disciplines dictates various readings as well as various focuses, which can extend beyond the theologically-charged content.

As I mentioned previously, the range of interpretative possibilities is well represented: from perceiving the Whore of Babylon in her carnality, in her femininity, to reducing her to a literary, rhetorical, political figure, thus defeminizing her completely. Also, the interpretations above cover the spectrum ranging from a corporeal identification to 'just a metaphor', from a text in which a *woman* is both victimizer and victimized, to a political liberative text, in the light of justice being served, from a powerful social model to an ethical and rhetorical literary model as well as also bearing iconographical references.

The gendered image of Apocalypse 17 encompasses also the metaphoric options, from politicized to depoliticized, that is from a political symbol, most often identified with Rome, but applicable to any politically exploitive regime, while also stressing its mythical character, drawing from Ancient Near Eastern mythology as well as Hellenistic environment.

The postmodern outlook addresses more and more contemporary realities, therefore (involuntarily) aiding in gradually contouring the misogynistic content of the Great Whore of Babylon. If the metaphorical reading is preferred, many feminists object to it for its violence and misogyny.

Readers (reading without context) are usually confused at the distinction made between a literal and a non-literal reading of 'whore' cognates, where we actually position our gendered imagery.

In order to distinguish between the various uses within the text, scholarship usually distinguishes between meanings of πορνεύω to 2:14. 20, 17:2, 18:3.9, πορνεία 2:21, 9:21,

14:8, 17:2.4, 18:3, 19:2. In addition, πόρνη is used figuratively of a power that is hostile to God, and God's people in 17:1.5.15-16, 19:2. The exceptional literal uses in vice lists are in 9:21, 21:8, and 22:15.⁴⁷⁸

I believe that educating the readers with regard to the sources of the imagery on prostitution in John's time is as crucial as focusing on the gendered aspect of the metaphor.

Additionally, stressing on the attitudes of readers while reading, these are increasingly emotional. Within a range that encompasses anger to pity, readers are very often left with mixed feelings. With regard to the Apocalypse, in particular chapter 17, readers, who seriously contemplate the carnality of the imagery are ambivalent: on the one hand they feel empowered by how beautiful, powerful and glamorous the prostitute is portrayed, perceiving her as a sublimated and repressed goddess-like creature⁴⁷⁹ and on the other hand they feel appalled by the bloodthirsty, morally filthy harlot.

Considering the above, I would not go as far as asserting that the image of Great Whore in the Apocalypse is entirely negative and degrading,⁴⁸⁰ although I am ready to accept it is not necessarily liberating.

Such an assumption rests on the acknowledgement of the metaphorical force of the image as well as its influence on the 'feeling mind'.

The image is also rooted in cultural assumptions and so the text could be criticized at this level.

However, by appeal to the con-text, that is the literary, as well as the non-literary surroundings of the text, the image transmits much more than what it conveys at a literal level. In this way, gender is employed for the image to achieve effectiveness.

In Part II intend to show *what*, *how* and *why* certain elements in the compositional texture in the characterization of the Great Whore were extracted and preferred over others.

As a result, the singularity of the image in the vision of Apocalypse 17 is seriously questioned.

Additionally, I am not fully conceived by the pure socio-political relevance of the image in the manner Vander Stichele, Jean Kim and Avaren Ipsen are. Although an important

⁴⁷⁸ Cf. πορνεία in 9:21; πόρνος (one who practices sexual immorality) in 21:8, 22:15 in Paul Trebilco, *The Early Christians in Ephesus from Paul to Ignatius* (Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 166), Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004, 545, (ft.164).

⁴⁷⁹ Ipsen, *Sex Working and the Bible*, 169.

⁴⁸⁰ Barr, *Women in Myth and History*, 60.

dimension in the construction of the image, this aspect fails to entail all other dimensions regarding the Whore, hence the necessity for a holistic approach.

Looking into the gendered constructs in the text on the one hand, and on the other hand, in the cultural context in which there were issued seems a pertinent endeavor, these stand in opposition with some of the assumptions in the postmodern gendered-informed readings.

It is for the reasons above that the current dissertation is scholarly situated among the postmodern approaches in analyzing the depiction of the Great Whore as emerging from the vision of Apocalypse 17 that insists on the insufficiency of the data provided by a pure historical-critical reading, as Elizabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza's.

At the same time, I prefer to keep away from a pure literal interpretation, such as the one of Tina Pippin and Marla Selvidge.

By insisting on the untranslatability of the metaphorical construction used to depict the Great Whore, I affiliate myself along the line of Eva-Maria Räßle, Greg Carey and partially gain inspiration from Barbara Rossing, Lynn Huber, Hanna Roose. Although with different focuses, the above mentioned authors have in common to various degrees the enlarging of the scope of the exegetical interpretations. Until recently, domains such as Greco-Roman literature, culture and visual arts remained largely unsearched and so they could provide valuable input in the current interpretation.

I believe that *constientization* resides in embracing the negative aspects in the presentation of the Great Whore.

The scope of the current paper is partially found in what was enunciated above: relating the image of the Great Prostitute to a well-established tradition is to make the image more understandable for today.

I believe that reading with context should not necessarily lead to disposing of the text, but rather coming with formulations that are in essence gender-sensitive. So far, this attempt has been understood as whitewashing the Whore.

Although, it seems John did not know any concrete women in flesh and blood, except Jezebel,⁴⁸¹ supported by the contemporary orientations of feminist studies, I cannot accept that the negative depiction of the real prostitute in everyday life does not carry an emotional charge meant at the change in the behaviour of the original, as well contemporary audience.

⁴⁸¹ Sutter Rehmann, Die Offenbarung Johannes, 729.

The approach I am currently following helps me identify better the possible reading and understanding of the feminine imagery of Apocalypse 17. As such, it assists me in shaping the distance between the ancient world and the contemporary one, with regard to language and means of expression of the divine.

To understand the same God as enemy and friend, as tormentor and saviour, to read the same Bible as enslaver and liberator, that is the paradoxical challenge of feminist hermeneutics.⁴⁸²

That is why reader's response criticism needs to be extended beyond the first women's subjective experience with the text.

There is a certain attitude of *fronde* associated with liberationist readings of the Apocalypse in general. However, strictly from a gender-informed perspective, the Great Whore does not seem to be in any case liberating for the contemporary readers. It can be at its very best an incentive for them in critically researching more into the depictions and roles of women in ancient societies as well as now. In doing so, raising awareness on the oppressive nature of androcentric formulations is imperious.

⁴⁸² Mary Ann Tolbert, Defining the Problem: The Bible and Feminist Hermeneutics, in: *Semeia* 28/ 1983, 113-126, 125, also Yarbrow Collins, *Feminist Perspectives on Biblical Scholarship*, 25-26.

Part II: The Vision of the Great Whore in Apocalypse 17:1-6

Introduction

Chapter 17 of the Apocalypse operates as an appendix⁴⁸³ to the last of the patterns of sevens –seals, trumpets and bowls of wrath, all of which spread textually from 4:1 to 16:21 –namely, the vision of the seven vials comprising 15:1 to 16:21.⁴⁸⁴

A great earthquake (16:8) accompanies the divine proclamation of the fall of Babylon, as well as a plague of hailstones (16:21). The destruction of the Great Whore is part of a larger section dealing with the annihilation of God's enemies, which brings about victory for Christ and his followers (17:1-21:8).⁴⁸⁵

These will be followed by the description of the New Jerusalem, epilogue and final blessing (21:9-22:21).

The treatment of the Great Whore in the Apocalypse occupies from beginning to the end a considerable textual portion. Her description and detailed punishment –by contrast with any other gendered character, irrespective of its ethical quality ascribed spans over two chapters out of 22, respectively from 17:1 to 19:4.

Although it is referred to as a future event,⁴⁸⁶ the judgment is depicted as accomplished only later, in Rev 19:1-10 when it is followed by an acclamation of God's justice.

⁴⁸³ Yarbro Collins, *The Combat Myth*, 32; Elizabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza's formulation as per "appended interlude to the bowl septet" (eadem, *Justice and Judgment*, 172), also Felise Tavo, *Woman, Mother and Bride: An Exegetical Investigation Into the "Ecclesial" Notions of the Apocalypse* (Biblical Tools and Studies), Leuven: Peeters, 2008, 29: she parallels the 'Babylon Appendix' (17:1-19:10) to the 'Jerusalem Appendix' (21:9-22:5). Cf. Austin Farrer, *A Rebirth of Images: The Making of St. John's Apocalypse*, New York: State University of New York Press, 1986, 45.

⁴⁸⁴ Yarbro Collins, art. The Apocalypse (Revelation), 1012, cf. David Aune, *Revelation 17-22* (Word Biblical Commentary 52C), Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998, 882-891, Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 812-46.

Another perspective on Apocalypse 17 opts for listing the current vision among the explanatory visions of the Apocalypse, representing the heavenly response to the prayers and outcries for justice uttered by the witnesses. (Schüssler-Fiorenza, *Vision of a Just World*, 93).

⁴⁸⁵ If one moves forward in the text, the following subthemes occur: Babylon (17:1-19:10), Satan (20:1-10), unbelievers (20:11-15), overcomers (21:1-8). Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 136.

⁴⁸⁶ In view of larger context created by the Apocalypse, the fall of Babylon the Great is prefigured already in 14:8 –ἐπεσεν ἔπεσεν βαβυλὼν ἡ μεγάλη ἥ ἐκ τοῦ οἴνου τοῦ θυμοῦ τῆς πορνείας αὐτῆς πεπότικεν πάντα τὰ ἔθνη –Cf. 18:2 for a verbatim introduction.

Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God; for his judgments are true and just; he has judged the great whore who corrupted the earth with her fornication, and he has avenged on her the blood of his servants – Ἀλληλούϊα· ἡ σωτηρία καὶ ἡ δόξα καὶ ἡ δύναμις τοῦ θεοῦ ἡμῶν; ὅτι ἀληθινὰ καὶ δίκαιαι αἱ κρίσεις αὐτοῦ· ὅτι ἔκρινεν τὴν πόρνην τὴν μεγάλην ἣτις ἔφθειρεν τὴν γῆν ἐν τῇ πορνείᾳ αὐτῆς, καὶ ἐξεδίκησεν τὸ αἷμα τῶν δούλων αὐτοῦ ἐκ χειρὸς αὐτῆς (19:1-2).

The current study focuses preponderantly on the description of the Whore as featured in the vision of Apocalypse 17:1-6. As depicted in the text, the figure of the Great Whore is portrayed as a drunken woman and cannibalistic whore, intoxicated by human blood, ostentatiously adorned and astride a hideous Beast.

This vision develops a female imagery, i.e. an image that expresses in some way a woman's –in this case, a whore's –dependence on male characters, permeated by sexual undertones and inspired from the adornment and bejewelment of women in general.

Her depiction is primarily expressed in the use of derogatory terms –together with their cognates. The catalogue of her sins lists *fornication* (πορνεία), *extravagance*, *impurities of religious and immoral nature* (βδέλυγμα), possibly *murder*.

All these are incompatible with the ascetic worldview of the Christian perspective favoured in the Apocalypse.

Biblical scholarship, despite the various orientations, including some of the gender-informed perspectives acknowledges to various extents, the fact that the Great Whore of Apocalypse 17 is in fact a *metaphor*, particularly a gendered metaphor and rapport themselves to various intertextual traditions to support their argumentation, in a quest for this metaphor's correct interpretation.

This goes beyond the literal understanding of the text, though a metaphor rests in acknowledging the power of the words, as signs that “represent things or realities other than themselves.”⁴⁸⁷ Words operate in reference to other realities or things. Here lies the core understanding of a metaphor, essentially “a splendid example of intertextuality”.⁴⁸⁸

Additionally, the elusiveness of a metaphor is constitutive just as that of language. The words behind the image are very powerful. They are paired with a history of interpretations, as well as certain associations, irrespective of the context where they are read.

Metaphor does not apply to a unidimensional existence, but is brought to life, or activated by readership.

⁴⁸⁷ Huber, *Like a Bride Adorned*, 2007, 58 in discussing Augustine's semiotic theory. Cf. Janet Martin Soskice, *Metaphor and Religious Language*, Oxford: Clarendon, 1985, 15.

⁴⁸⁸ Jean-Pierre Ruiz, *Ezekiel in the Apocalypse: The Transformation of Prophetic Language in Revelation 16,17-19,10* (European University Studies: Theology Series 376), Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1989, 65.

The social relevance of the image is also an important dimension to elaborate upon. In interpreting any metaphor, the text is very important. However, equally, if not more important is the information outside the text. Readers bring to the interpretations cultural assumptions, social conventions, various types of experience, as well as associations. Subsequently, an image such as the Great Whore aims at awaking certain associations in the readers, on the one hand with regard to the feminine sexuality. On the other hand, such image does stem from a rich religious background, where it oozes much more plurivalent associations than the explicit sexually-connoted ones. Therefore, it is important how the image of the Great Whore is interpretatively handled, especially because its formulation is grounded in the actual perception of women. As such, on the one hand, it speaks from our realities, on the other hand, it could potentially lead to a certain condemnation of feminine immoral behaviour to be found in contemporary social realities. Literary or theological writings include cultural assumptions, stereotypes, where role assigning and division feature as atemporal social components of society. As a result, literature is contextualized. Either theological or belletristic literature entails to a certain extent a mimetic character in reference to life, while concomitantly reflecting life back to us. Metaphors “rely on conventions of society as well as influence individuals’ and societies’ view of reality.”⁴⁸⁹ Nevertheless, they portray reality not in an absolute way, but only partially,⁴⁹⁰ leaving open possibilities of interpretation, evoking meaningful perspectives.

In other words, by creative use of traditions, linguistically, new, unencountered images are shaped aiming to move in some way the reader, as well to actively engage his/her mind in the reading process.

The engagement is always different, informed by various contexts and accomplished to various degrees. The manner in which we perceive and understand metaphors is “fashioned through and grounded in experience and culture”.⁴⁹¹

Context and *experience* are key parameters in adequately grasping the essence of a metaphor. These are not to be analyzed separately, since experience occurs always in a type of a context, such as a socio-historical one.

⁴⁸⁹ Mary E. Shields, *Circumscribing the Prostitute. The Rhetorics of Intertextuality, Metaphor and Gender in Jer 3.1-4.4* (Journal for the Study of Old Testament Supplement Series 387), London: T&T Clark International, 2004, 76. Cf. Sals, *Die Biographie*, 3.

⁴⁹⁰ Cf. Räßple, *The Metaphor of the City*, 44-45.

⁴⁹¹ Richard Bailey, Conceptual Metaphor, Language, Literature and Pedagogy, in: *Journal of Language and Learning*, vol 1(2)/ 2003, 59-70, 59 also available at http://webspace.buckingham.ac.uk/kbernhardt/journal/jllearn/1_2/bailey.html (last accessed 12.01.2013).

Metaphors are intrinsically connected with *culture*: they are shaped and subsequently used according to a specific set of cultural assumptions. In this context, a metaphor is “a reflection of the author’s individual worldview.”⁴⁹²

Additionally, metaphors build on shared knowledge among individuals adhering to certain cultural norms. It is for this reason that they also have a communal aspect.⁴⁹³

Subsequently, John, the author of the Apocalypse uses indirect language to ‘cultivate intimacy’,⁴⁹⁴ grounded in the familiarity necessary to understand the metaphorical expressions. The engagement or participation strengthens the communal⁴⁹⁵ aspect between the reader and the writer on the one hand, and people and socio-cultural groups⁴⁹⁶, on the other hand.

However, apart from what is said, there is also a lot *implied*.

‘Decoding’ is never fully achieved and so, it triggers unlimited imaginative possibilities. The Biblical metaphor in particular has God, as the culmination of referential possibilities.⁴⁹⁷

Besides a communicative function⁴⁹⁸, a metaphor has a cognitive value in that it “has the ability to reorganize our thoughts, introducing associations and assumptions that we would perhaps not ourselves imagined, or even desired.”⁴⁹⁹

As a result, a “metaphor is one of the most powerful, if not subversive, tools of persuasion.”⁵⁰⁰ The rhetoric of innuendo⁵⁰¹ is John *indirect* rhetorical strategy to characterize, accept or reject those who threaten his worldview, by means of creating a dualistic narrative world and contrasting characters.⁵⁰² Indirect communication is community-bound.

⁴⁹² Elena Semino and Gerard Steen, Metaphor in Literature, in: Raymond W. Gibbs Jr. (ed.), *The Cambridge Handbook of Metaphor and Thought*, Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008, 232-246, 239.

⁴⁹³ Ted Cohen, Metaphor and the Cultivation of Intimacy in: Sheldon Sacks (ed.) *On Metaphor*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978, 3-12, 6.

⁴⁹⁴ This type of ‘special’ intimacy is built between the implied reader and the implied speaker (cf. Cohen, Metaphor, 3-12), being “the bond which unites those who are reasonably deemed capable of hearing it –and indeed, uttering it –with understanding” (cf. David E. Cooper, *Metaphor*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986, 156).

⁴⁹⁵ Cohen, Metaphor, 6.

⁴⁹⁶ Cooper, Metaphor, 166.

⁴⁹⁷ R  pple, *The Metaphor of the City*, 213.

⁴⁹⁸ Nielsen, *There is Hope for a Tree*, 31.

⁴⁹⁹ Moughtin-Mumby, *Sexual and Marital Metaphors*, 1.

⁵⁰⁰ Moughtin-Mumby, *Sexual and Marital Metaphors*, 1.

⁵⁰¹ Duff, *Who Rides the Beast?*, 71-83.

⁵⁰² R  pple, *The Metaphor of the City*, 19.

This is a powerful rhetorical strategy having a “strangely persuasive power because of its remarkable ability to bind together a community.”⁵⁰³

i. Identifying the Problem

It is very difficult to counterpoise the two compositional dimensions (i.e. the human and the political) of the tridimensional composition of the gendered metaphor in Rev 17 displays, namely ‘whore’-‘woman’-‘city’.

By this, I would like to point out, on the one hand, at the gap existing between the analyses following the historical-critical method and the feminist-critical approaches.⁵⁰⁴ On the other hand, I would also like to underline the discrepancy resulting in different focuses with the different orientations of various feminist approaches.

Because the theoretical aspects were described previously, I will not repeat the entire discussion. I would however like to mention the underlying Ricoeurian schism between the ‘substitutionary’ understandings of the metaphor as opposed to the ‘tensive’ understandings.⁵⁰⁵ The schism operates as a parallel to the discrepancy with regard to the two interpretative approaches mentioned previously.

Subsequently, with ‘substitutionary’ formulations, the meaning is ‘translatable’ into propositional language, whereas, the ‘tensive’ understanding corroborates meaning from various sources, without focusing on the ‘translatable’. The latter opinion is characteristic of the postmodern approaches and opens up multiple interpretative directions.

This separation can be formulated as bearing generic markers, with the traditional substitutionary view emphasizing androcentrism and the tensive view relying more on self-awareness when engaged in the reading process, thus resisting androcentrism.

Feminist analyses belonging to historical-critical method usually do not usually identify a generic problem in the Apocalypse, just like the feminist-critical approaches.

With feminist-critical readings, the gendered metaphor questions the givenness, the naturalness of androcentrism in Biblical texts.

⁵⁰³ Duff, *Who Rides the Beast?*, 80.

⁵⁰⁴ Although the schism described above does not entirely fit the current feminist-oriented concerns, the latter registers a far more varied palette of orientations that include even some analyses pertaining to the historical-critical method, with a different focus, however.

⁵⁰⁵ Ricoeur, *The Rule of the Metaphor*, 4.

Without exception, exegetes employing the traditional approaches read early, already in the analysis of the introductory verses of chapter 17, the reference of the last verse of the chapter, namely the one regarding the identification of the Whore with a 'city' (or even Apocalypse 18 as a whole).

In cases such as the above, the corporeality is underfocused and the political dimension is overfocused.

Additionally, the discontent with the treatment of metaphor of the Great Whore, constitutive of gender-informed approaches is given from several perspectives.

First, it should be noted that the textual image of the Great Whore occurs as gendered.

This character is not only belittled by derogatory names, but also depicted in manner to activate and consistently cultivate repulsive feelings on the behalf of readers –as Prime Enemy of the Christian community.

Then, a further point is given by the cognitive value of the (gendered) metaphors.

In the depiction of the Great Whore, the cognitive gain is limited, especially since the character depicted does not change whatsoever throughout the apocalyptic drama, but persists in wickedness and arrogance. This may be conceived as one of the chief reasons for her utter punishment and destruction following in the next chapter(s).

Since the analysis in isolation of the Great Whore bereaves the readers from a good chunk of pertaining to the essence⁵⁰⁶ of the metaphor, one should look into the intratextual contrastive schemes in the Apocalypse deeply informed by generic markers. The presentations of four gendered manifestations articulate two contrastive pairs: Jezebel and the Great Whore on the one hand and on the other hand, the Woman clothed with the Sun and the Bride of the Lamb.

The contrastive dualist scheme offers insights on the type of relationship God has with the created world, as well as with the faithful followers, respectively that of ultimate protection and comfort, no matter how desperate the current situation may be.

In view of the larger picture unfolding in the apocalyptic scenario, I personally fail to understand the rejection of the cognitive gain the metaphor of the Great Whore advances.

Otherwise, the problem with feminist-critical presentations of Apocalypse 17 resides in the fact that these do not usually expand beyond verse 3, or 4 of the same chapter.

⁵⁰⁶ Peter W. Macky, *The Centrality of Metaphors to Biblical Thought: A Method for Interpreting the Bible* (Studies in the Bible and Early Christianity 19), Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen, 1990, 49.

At the maximum, they include verse 16 as a rhetorical device, where the acts of violence awaiting the Whore are narrated. These actions are usually subsumed to the larger theme of violence against God's enemies in general, and against women in particular, as depicted in the Apocalypse of John.

Almost without exception, such a truncated analysis overemphasizing the human aspect in the tridimensional metaphor reinforces the existing contemporary negative stereotypical depictions of women, as well as female sexuality. In this manner, these analyses legitimize occasionally the male physical violence against women, which is paradoxically the very essence a feminist analysis tries to eradicate.

With such analyses, the political character of the gendered metaphor is minimized in favour of a more generic reading.

Additionally, with the same feminist critical orientation, various reading strategies could become retrodictive, by overlooking the sources which prompted the creation of the gendered metaphor. An example would be the accusation of misogyny⁵⁰⁷ attributed to the Seer and permeating the apocalyptic text.

Gender issues were not even 'issues' at the moment when the Apocalypse of John was written. A pertinent gendered-informed exegetical analysis of the text should wisely take into account that such a development is a modern phenomenon and should formulate it in a postmodern framework.

ii. The Construction of the Gendered Metaphor

It was stressed several times already that the corporeal dimension is very important with the metaphor of the Great Whore.

While this makes the metaphor highly effective in term of readers' reception, the corporeal dimension is not singular.

Given its references to Babylon, the image in question includes also the political dimension. Thus, the non-Biblical name of *the Great Whore Babylon* emerges and progressively develops three compositional dimensions, being read as 'whore', embodied in a 'woman' and named like a 'city'.

I am extremely particular about this order of reading the dimensions. It is actual the result of close reading without being too much involved in the OT intertextual references that preclude the political aspect to the generic one.

⁵⁰⁷ Cf. among others Tina Pippin, *Death and Desire*, 105, Catherine Keller, *Apocalypse Now and Then: A Feminist Guide to the End of the World*, Boston: Beacon Press, 1996, also Garrett, *Revelation*, 469-474.

The dimensions mentioned above comprise the text at explicit, as well as implicit levels. It structures as a complex image.

Subsequently, the explicit referents entail aspects belonging to sexuality, gender and politics, while the implicit level adduces valuable information with regard to a certain interpretation of historical realities, and a religious character of the object interpreted.

In the following, closer attention will be offered to both what is given in the text and what is inferred from what is given in the text.

Textual Compositional Elements

Before analyzing in detail the corresponding relations between compositional elements of the generic metaphor in Apocalypse 17, I would like to note, that it is not a single word that denotes a metaphor, but certain relations between words. Words and relations between the words construct this image. It is only corroborated, not individually that these words form into a metaphorical device.

To exemplify what I mean, I would like to state that the image of the Apocalypse 17 means much more than the sum of individual words. These form a metatextual entity by associating in a given co(n)text⁵⁰⁸ 'whore' with 'woman' and with 'city'.

The image complex comprises a visual movement from general to particular and from down to up, mostly evident in the subunit of vv. 3-6.

Starting with a general view on the setting of the vision, namely the desert, the narrative description notes closely a woman seated on a beast as the main focus of the vision. It goes on to include information on the clothes and the jewels she is wearing, on the inscription on her forehead, as well as the content of the cup she holds in her hand. The vision concludes with naming her state of mind –drunk, as well as the source of her inebriation – the blood of the saints and of the witnesses to Jesus (17:6).

As the description unfolds before our eyes, one firstly notes the Beast, its scarlet colour, its ten horns and seven heads serving as a throne for the woman. Upwards in the description, the woman follows, donning expensive attire, perceived as so, by naming the colours she wears, (scarlet and purple), completed by pearls, other precious stones and gold. She holds a golden cup in her hand with a description of the content, as well as a name on her

⁵⁰⁸ By 'cotext', I mean the "immediate literary context" (cf. Peter Cotterell and Max Turner, *Linguistics and Biblical Interpretation*, London: SPCK, 1989, 16).

forehead. Although not offering any information on the facial features, the Seer notes her advanced state of drunkenness.

Irrespective of the cinematic movement, from general to particular, or from downwards to upwards, the description of the vision, the reader is also provided with a reaction of the Seer, respectively *marvel*.

The gendered character in the vision is introduced the great prostitute (πόρνη), visually depicted as a woman (γυνή) and identified as the great city (ἡ πόλις ἡ μεγάλη).

Ulrike Sals⁵⁰⁹ considers two important stratal components in the composition, which feature textually: the *woman* (γυνή) and the *city* (πόλις).

Their cognates predominate in different chapter: *woman* predominates in chapter 17, while *city* in chapter 18.

However γυνή and πόλις have certain anchoring points in which the concepts blend with each other, namely in 17:18 –καὶ ἡ γυνή ἣν εἶδες ἔστιν ἡ πόλις ἡ μεγάλη ἡ ἔχουσα βασιλείαν ἐπὶ τῶν βασιλείων τῆς γῆς.

The semantic field associations are enriched by additional concepts of *whore* pertaining to the dimension of ‘woman’ and *Babylon*, belonging to the dimension of ‘city’, united accordingly by the attribute μεγάλη.

These concepts function differently in the text: they act as anchoring points in 14:8 and 17:5, where they unite the references to ‘Babylon’ with the ‘city’ –ἔπεσεν ἔπεσεν Βαβυλῶν ἡ μεγάλη ἥ ἐκ τοῦ οἴνου τοῦ θυμοῦ τῆς πορνείας αὐτῆς πεπότικεν πάντα τὰ ἔθνη, as well as to the ‘woman’ with ‘Babylon’ –καὶ ἐπὶ τὸ μέτωπον αὐτῆς ὄνομα γεγραμμένον, μυστήριον, Βαβυλῶν ἡ μεγάλη, ἡ μήτηρ τῶν πορνῶν καὶ τῶν βδελυγμάτων τῆς γῆς, where the possessive pronoun αὐτῆς is indicative of the noun ‘woman’ from the previous two verses.

At this level, some amendments are needed.

The dimension of *woman*, referred textually is secondary to that of *whore*, just as *Babylon* is to that of *city*.

Subsequently, only after the Seer is invited to see the judgment of the Great Whore (17:2), does he see a woman (17:3), whom he further describes and who bears the title on her forehead ‘Babylon the Great, mother of whores’(17:5).

Moreover, surprisingly, it not Babylon that is identified as a city, but the woman in 17:18 “and the woman that you saw is the great city”.

In addition to that, not all four referents are united by the attribute *great* –μεγάλη. The woman is lacking such characteristic.

⁵⁰⁹ Sals, *Die Biographie*, 81.

A close reading to the text is imposed for it may alter the traditional exegetical orientation of the analysis of the vision of Apocalypse 17, responsible for creating the gulf in the academic guild.

I do agree however with Sals on the acknowledgement of the two stratal components, the human and the political, in addition to the fact that the cohesion of this complex needs to be sought for and no elements should be analyzed out of co(n)text, as well as in isolation from each other.

With respect to the vision of 17:1-6, the human aspect is much more elaborated than the eventual political undertones.

John constructs it by means of presenting certain items in the characterization of the 'woman'.

Textually, she is introduced as promiscuous whore who sits on many waters, (v.1) and the kings of the earth have committed fornication with her (v. 2). The inhabitants of the earth also share in the inebriating effects of the 'wine of her fornication' (v. 2).

Further, the Whore, identified as *woman* by the Seer is depicted as 'sitting'. This time only her seat is a scarlet beast (v.3).

She is in the following depicted as wearing extravagant clothes and jewelry, wearing expensive fabric of scarlet and purple and is bedecked in gold, precious stones, and pearls.

The amalgamation of luxurious items showcases the fact that the Great Whore is definitely a character to behold, dressed to impress.

Her name is revealed on her forehead. It is constitutive of her identity, probably even more than her glamorous appearance: the name of Babylon –a city charged with emotional connotation and more specifically with an ethical or moral value –followed by an apposition that is not at all flattering: 'mother of whores and of earth's abominations'.

Later on she is drunk, but the source of her inebriation, respectively blood of saints and of witnesses to Jesus causes a WOW-effect on the Seer that leaves room for further interpretation.

Implied Elements

The textual data is assessed from a different perspective, other than the pure textual one. Elements can be inferred, either by means of evaluating the co(n)text in which they occur, by comparison with similar textual situations or by means of relation with other characters depicted in the Apocalypse.

Since what is textually said about the Great Whore was amply mentioned above, what is not said, or what is implied about her is far more interesting.

The gendered depiction in Apocalypse 17 is introduced and delineated by her sexuality, namely, a whore. Under this heading should be understood all the subsequent negative characteristics.

Every verse in the vision of vv.3-6 adduces important elements pertaining to the complex image of the Great Whore. Such elements were on several occasions referred to as the analysis of the vision was elaborated.

The first two verses depict a lifestyle without God, where a chaotic *promiscuous* activity is lead.

Fulfilling carnal desires rooted in instincts definitely shape for the readers the parametres within which the gendered character operates.

Additionally, the Whore vision ties a figurative complex of greatness and power, either by means of adjectives describing the Whore (μεγάλη) or by her posture (καθημένη). The Great Whore is depicted twice as 'seated' (v.2.3), or 'sitting', a participle describing God in the throne room (cf. 5:13, 6:16, 7:10.15, 19:4, 21:5) or God's acolytes (cf. 6:2.4f, 19:11.18). Closely connected to this aspect, the larger vision, also encompassing chapter 18 evidentiates figures of government, in virtue of her naming herself queen (βασίλισσα), but also if one considers her alliances with the kings of the earth (βασιλεῖς τῆς γῆς), with the magnates of the earth (μεγιστᾶνες τῆς γῆς).

Another figurative complex united in the textual structure of the Whore is *wealth*, by means of the luxurious items she is wearing (v.4), as well as economically profitable associations depicted extensively in chapter 18.

Wealth comes paired with power, for it expresses *status*. The colours denoting her clothes, respective 'scarlet and purple' are indicative of prosperity in Ancient World, given the difficulty to procure these dyes.⁵¹⁰

Surprisingly, she is the only textually mentioned '*mother*' in the Apocalypse, however, her love generates [daughter]-whores and abominations on earth (v.5).

The terms delineating the Great Whore, respectively 'whore', 'woman', 'mother', bear a negative stamp and evaluation. Even if, these do not relate to a certain woman in flesh, they do incorporate aspects from the human existence, as well as an abnormality with relation to the social roles of women in general.

The name she is wearing on her forehead (Βαβυλών) brings to memory a sad period in the history of Israel as the kingdom that destroyed the First Temple.⁵¹¹ It carries an important

⁵¹⁰ Cf. Part II for an extensive treatment of the two colours.

religious and political load, becoming the epitome of destructive power.⁵¹² Among the associates of this name, one could list the opposition to God,⁵¹³ “not only geographically and politically, but also personally”,⁵¹⁴ the complete embodiment of evil. The adjective describing Βαβυλών is great –μεγάλη bears also associations of ‘grandeur’, ‘luxury’, ‘splendour’.

Pamela Thimmes is convinced that naming conventions function to establish “boundaries and polarities”, “a way of controlling [...] how they (i.e. women in the Apocalypse) are interpreted; they do not have real names, or their own names, only symbolic names.”⁵¹⁵

In the Great Whore’s *hubris*, she became an imitator of divine attributes, evident from the content of cup, her posture and self-evaluation. The Great Whore thus becomes an anti-God figure and in this context, her punishment is well deserved.

Her *wickedness*, as well as *arrogance* are also inferred by her association with the Beast, notorious for its destructive effects on the people of God throughout the Apocalypse (cf. chapters 12 and 13).

Later on, the Great Whore is depicted drunk (v.6), but the source of her inebriation, respectively ‘blood of saints and of witnesses to Jesus’ makes her *impious* (asebousa), *insolent* (hubrizousa) and *contemptuous* (kataphrousa).⁵¹⁶

Overall, an assessment of her extravagance (polutelês) results in a doubtful noble origin, as well as well possibly point to her scheming character, in which arrogance is a chief-attribute.

Ambivalence also characterizes the feminine figure of Apocalypse 17: wealth and fame contrast with the consequences of her actions, her dominant position and the proclamation of her end.⁵¹⁷

⁵¹¹ Bernard McGinn, art. Babylon.Christianity, in: Hermann Spieckermann et al. (eds.) *Encyclopedia of the Bible and Its Reception* (vol. 3), Berlin/Boston: Walter de Gruyter, 2011, 274-276, 274.

⁵¹² Ulrike Sals, art. Babylon, Hebrew Bible/ Old Testament, in: Hermann Spieckermann et al. (eds.), *Encyclopedia of the Bible and Its Reception* (vol. 3), 260-266, 261.

⁵¹³ McGinn, ‘Christianity’, 275.

⁵¹⁴ McGinn, ‘Christianity’, 276. Cf. Räßle, *the Metaphor of the City*, 156.

⁵¹⁵ Thimmes, *Women Reading Women in the Apocalypse*, 136.

⁵¹⁶ For the respective denominations cf. the description of a hetaira of Allison Glazebrook, *The Bad Girls of Athens: The Image and Function of Hetairai in Judicial Oratory*, in: Christopher A. Faraone, Laura K. McClure, *Prostitutes and Courtesans in the Ancient World*, 125-139, 127.

⁵¹⁷ Daria Pezzoli-Olgia, *Zwischen Gericht und Heil. Frauengestalten in der Johannesoffenbarung*, in: *Biblische Zeitschrift* 43/1999, 72-91, 85.

On a textual level, the contrast between what is written and what is meant is evident in the following paraphrasing applicable to the entire chapter 17: *the whore is not a woman, the woman is not a city, and the city is not Babylon.*

The message this metaphor gives is that eventually the *prostitute* (i.e the Great Whore) *is not woman*, but a city. And here lies the core of the feminist substance of this gendered image. Glossing over the generic essence of the vision and referring to the destruction of *Babylon* as to that of a city obfuscates a good chunk of the compositional element of this current metaphor, namely the human dimension.

In the following, I will show various approaches to the metaphorical reading the Great Whore, each of these attempting to explicate the mystery of the woman –τὸ μυστήριον τῆς γυναικὸς (v. 7).

As mentioned previously, these are associated with the traditional methods, in which a one-to-one correspondence between various compositional elements is highly appreciated. They also attempt at analyzing the generic character with reference to commonplaces in literary tradition, as well as rhetoric.

1. Introduction to Vision: vv. 1-2

In the introductory verses of the Apocalypse 17, the revelation is predominantly *visual*.

When reading this excerpt as integrative part in the Apocalypse, there are at least two ways of viewing these two verses.

One could move backward, but also forward in the text of the aforementioned book. These strategies correspond to a text-oriented reading, consisting of exegetical analysis of keywords.

A detailed analysis based on subunit-divisions will follow. Among them, the first sub-unit 17:1-2 will comprise analyses of the text itself, aiming towards an understanding of the text on a semantic and syntactic level.

A subsequent analysis of the *context* will represent the stepping-stone in the creation of the “horizon of expectation” and will include mostly moving backward, and occasionally forward in the text.

Intertextual connections with the OT will be established at this point mostly thematically.

The purpose of such a theoretical endeavour is to assess further some of the elements in the text, putting them in an intra- and intertextual dialogue with both Apocalypse and Old Testament. Thus they will prove that understanding the intertexts can form and enrich our horizon of expectation.

Further, occasionally a hermeneutics of suspicion will be applied. This will revolve mainly on focusing on, rather than glossing over some corporeal aspects. If the analysis of the image is entirely dependent on an OT background, it results into an untimely identification of the Great Whore with its political manifestation.

Analysis of subsequent sexual language will be provided, as well as its value assessment, without diminishing the metaphorical character in the construction of the image.

1.1 Introducing the Protagonists

17:1 a	Καὶ ἦλθεν εἰς ἐκ τῶν ἑπτὰ ἀγγέλων τῶν ἔχόντων τὰς ἑπτὰ φιάλας	
17:1 b καὶ	ἐλάλησεν	μετ' ἐμοῦ λέγων•
17:1 c	δεῦρο,	δείξω σοι

τὸ κρίμα τῆς πόρνῃς τῆς μεγάλης
τῆς καθημένης ἐπὶ ὑδάτων πολλῶν,

(And one of the angels having the seven bowls spoke to me saying: Come, I will show you the judgment of the Great Whore, seated upon many waters)

So far, the setting of the vision is not specified. Up to this point, the last deictical reference was Apocalypse 15:5, where the Seer is witnessing in heaven, the opening in the temple of the tabernacle of testimony (ὁ ναὸς τῆς σκηνῆς τοῦ μαρτυρίου ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ). The Seer's visionary setting occurs in a temple in heaven.

Since the text does not signal any change in location from 15:5 onward, we would have to assume that at the point when the angel is addressing the Seer (17:1), the setting of the vision must be located in the same place, respectively in a heavenly temple.

In the next sub-section, we will notice that the Seer will be transported to another location.

Regarding information on the plot and the characters as provided by the introductory verse of the chapter, an oversimplified perspective would envisage an angel inviting the (human) narrator to witness the judgment of the Great Whore situated 'upon many waters'.

The conjunction καί is an indicator of the fact that this section is at a textual level cohesively dependent on the previous section. It possibly continues the events narrated earlier.

As previously mentioned, the agent or initiator of this scene is an angel, in Greek ἄγγελος. This occurrence is not at all unusual for the Apocalypse. The book is permeated with angels.⁵¹⁸ These heavenly creatures are extremely important for the apocalyptic literature,⁵¹⁹ where they usually feature as active emissaries of God, as well as instruct.

A variety of functions is attributed to them throughout the Apocalypse. Angels operate as *servants* (7:11.15), a function which they share with humankind (9:10, 22:8-9). There are also *guardian angels* (2-3), mentioned as the angels of the seven churches. They can be *angels of doom*, as they announce phases of the final judgment (10:1-7, 14:6-7): its initial processes (5:1-2, 14: 14-16), as well as involvement in it (8-9, 15-16, 20:1-3). Possibly as a *council*, they will witness Christ's denial of those who, in turn, denied him (3:5, cf. 14:10).

⁵¹⁸ Angels occur usually together with other characters, as part of the heavenly court, respectively, being usually depicted as standing before God and the Lamb (cf. the seven spirits (1:4, 4:5), the four creatures (4:6), the twenty-four elders (4:10, 11:6, 14:3), as well as a great multitude (7:9)). Their role can also be portrayed in a military fashion (19:14.19).

⁵¹⁹ To name only some examples, compare references to Zech 1:9, Dan 7:16, 2 Esdr 10:28-59, also Rev 5:5.

One of the seven angels having the seven bowls

In this particular case, the angel is referred to by the indefinite pronoun εἷς. We could assume either that he has not been mentioned before, or that his identity in itself is not important. However, the *gentivus partitivus* construction “ἐκ τῶν ἑπτὰ ἀγγέλων τῶν ἔχόντων τὰς ἑπτὰ φιάλας” (of the seven angels having the seven vials) points to his immediate identification with the group of the seven angels.

Another angel presented similarly (εἷς ἐκ τῶν ἑπτὰ ἀγγέλων τῶν ἔχόντων τὰς ἑπτὰ φιάλας) appears in Rev 21:9, offering the Seer guidance in the New Jerusalem (21:9-22:5).

This description acts in a twofold manner: on the one hand, it denotes group-identity while, at the same time, it links the vision to the preceding part, namely the heptad of the bowl-visions.

The Greek term, φιάλη is defined by BDAG as “bowl, specifically a bowl used in offerings”.⁵²⁰ In the following, I will use ‘vial’ and ‘bowl’ interchangeably.

Such bowls are possibly related to the golden bowls full of incense (φιάλας χρυσᾶς γεμούσας θυμιαμάτων) in 5:8, holding the prayers of the saints.

Rev 15:7 further specifies the number of the golden bowls, as well as their content in a different phrasing than in 5:8, respectively as “seven golden bowls full of the wrath of God” (γεμούσας τοῦ θυμοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ).

The angelic group as a whole is actively involved in carrying out the plagues introduced in 15:7 by pouring (ἐκχέω) of the seven vials of wrath of God (ἑπτὰ φιάλας χρυσᾶς γεμούσας τοῦ θυμοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ).

The plagues struck the earth (16:1) and are in order, malignant sores (16:2), sea transformed into blood (16:3), fresh water transformed into blood (16:4-7), people scorched as a result of the contaminated sun (16:8-9), darkness as a consequence of pouring the bowl on the seat of the Beast (16:10). The drying up of the Euphrates paved the way for the kings from the east’s gathering for the battle (16:12-16). Lastly, the

⁵²⁰ W. Bauer, F.W. Danker, W.F. Arndt, F.W. Gingrich (eds.), *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000, BibleWorks (v.8), (hereafter abbreviated BDAG) s.v. φιάλη. Its meaning can range from a ‘saucepan’ to a ‘cup’, referring more likely to a ‘cup’; cf. Isa 51:17.12, as per Ben Witherington III, *Revelation* (New Cambridge Bible Commentary), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003, 207.

contamination of the air (16:17), resulting into flashes of lightning, peals of thunder and voices and an earthquake (16:18) led to a three part division of the great city (16:19), affecting islands and mountains (16:20), as well as being accompanied by hailstone (16:21). These are better viewed as judgments, “bowls of wrath” (16:1, 15:1) effecting God’s punishment.

As such, the judgments connote with the Exodus plagues (Exod 7-12)⁵²¹ considered “both a literary and a theological model for the bowls”.⁵²²

Just like in the Exodus, “the goal of all seven bowl judgments is to demonstrate not only God’s incomparability and just judgment of sinners, but ultimately his glory (so 15:8, 16:9, cf. 11:13, 15-16, 15:4, 19:1-7) so again the main point of God’s glory is highlighted”.⁵²³

As a result, searching in the immediate context of these verses could significantly contribute to enabling the reader to clarify further his/her identity and role within this excerpt. The angel thus functions as an anchoring point with the previous subsection. From the context where the angel operates, the pronouncement of a divine judgment will follow.

Spoke to me

This angel speaks (ἐλάλησεν) with the Seer.

It is not uncommon that angels speak. One hears them on multiple occasions in the Apocalypse addressing different groups, as well as John, the Seer (cf. 7:3, 10:9, and 14:6.8.9.18, 17:1, 18:21, 19:7 and 21:9).

Not only do angels speak, but they are featured among other speaking characters, ranging from named to unnamed, from the exalted Christ (1:17) and the elders (7:13) to unidentified voices in 4:1, 11:1, 18:2.⁵²⁴

As mentioned previously, whenever the angels belonging to the group of seven speak, they usually bring forth proclamations of divine judgments (cf. 14:6.8.9.18). So, this is yet another reason to expect such a proclamation from the angel in 17:1.

⁵²¹ The plagues list water turned to blood killing all fish and other water life (Exod 7:14-25), amphibians (Exod 8:1-8:15), lice or gnats (Exod 8:16-19), beast or flies (Exod 8:20-30), disease on livestock (Exod 9:1-7), incurable boils (Exod 9:8-12), hail mixed with fire (Exod 9:13-35), locusts (Exod 10:1-20), darkness (Exod 10:21-29), death of the first-born of all Egyptian families (Exod 11:1-12:36).

⁵²² Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 148.

⁵²³ Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 148.

⁵²⁴ Also cf. Collins, *Towards the Morphology of a Genre*, 6.

As shown above, the angel engages in a dialogue with an interlocutor.⁵²⁵ The narratorial voice is referred by pronouns the first (μετ' ἐμοῦ cf. 17:1b) and second person singular (σοι cf. 17:1c), pointing to the fact that the account is reported in the 1st person singular. These corroborated show that John, the Seer referred to in Rev 1:1 is the narrator.

The verbal construction⁵²⁶ ἐλάλησεν μετ' ἐμοῦ is phrased iden?cally in 21:9. Up to this point in the lecture of the text of the Apocalypse, the phrasing in 17:1 is the first instance of an angel speaking to the Seer.

In other words, the Seer is revealed the divine message of Jesus Christ (ἀποκάλυψις Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, cf. 1:1) mediated through his angel⁵²⁷ (διὰ τοῦ ἀγγέλου αὐτοῦ), while being in the Spirit (ἐγενόμην ἐν πνεύματι, cf. 1:10) on the Lord's Day (ἐν τῇ κυριακῇ ἡμέρᾳ, cf. 1:10) as part of the heavenly ascent.⁵²⁸

He is commissioned to write in this book what he sees –ὁ βλέπεις γράψον εἰς βιβλίον 1:11 (cf. 1:19, 2:1.8.12.18, 3:1.7.14, 14:13, 19:9, 21:5 that are merely repeating this delegation). As evident from the above, the Seer's perspective and voice predominate in the Apocalypse, as visions unfold.

⁵²⁵ Collins, *Towards the Morphology of a Genre*, 6.

⁵²⁶ Smalley considers it Septuagintalism (cf. Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, 426).

⁵²⁷ The existence of angels has been connected to that of the distantness of God, who is understood to dwell in the midst of myriads of angels to whom he delegates the performance of various tasks. (Himmelfarb, *Revelation and Rupture*, 90).

Martin Hengel suggests, "the whole angelology was an indication that the figure of God has receded into the distance and that the angels were needed as intermediaries between Him, creation and Man". (Martin Hengel, *Judaism and Hellenism. Studies in their Encounter in Palestine during the early Hellenistic Period*, (vol. 1), Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1974, 233).

While Hengel *legitimizes* the distance between God and this world, Martha Himmelfarb gives an account for the existence of angels as intermediaries in the apocalyptic writings as an attempt to *overcome* the distance between humanity and God.

She continues that, the heavens are full of angels precisely to assure human beings of the contact with the sphere of divine, if only its periphery. (Himmelfarb, *Revelation and Rupture*, 90).

In the same vein, Himmelfarb correctly suggests "the heroes of the Bible talked with God, but the heroes of the apocalypses, overall talk with angels". (Himmelfarb, *Revelation and Rupture*, 90).

⁵²⁸ Heavenly journeys have precedents not only in Palestinian Judaism but also in the Greek tradition where journeys to the otherworld are known from the classical period. Cf. Harold W. Attridge, *Greek and Latin Apocalypses in: Semeia* 14/1979, 159-186.

In the Greco-Roman world, Collins traces otherworldly journeys back to Parmenides and even Homer (Collins, *Morphology of a Genre*, 16).

Another taxonomy divides the revealed visions in the course of the journey into two types: they can be *symbolic visions*, whose images are not intended to be literally true, but whose interpretation refers to heavenly and earthly beings and events (Dan 2:7) and *visions of heavenly beings, places, events*. (Yarbro Collins, *Cosmology and Eschatology in Jewish and Christian Apocalypticism*, 11).

While dialogue occurs quite frequently in the Apocalypse up until this moment, John's interlocutors were either the exalted Christ (1:9-20; 4:1) or one of the twenty-four elders (7:13-14).

In the following, the Seer is noting in direct speech the scope of the angel's coming and speaking to him.

As initiator,⁵²⁹ the angel's actions are described as following: he came –ἦλθεν (17:1a), spoke – ἐλάλησεν (17:1b) and said –λέγων (17:1b). In 17:7, the angel will question, respectively explain the vision, in the manner of an *angelus interpretes*⁵³⁰ using verbs from the stem (i.e. λέγω).

The particle δεῦρο and the combination of these verbs (ἦλθεν, ἐλάλησεν, λέγων) appears verbatim in the Apocalypse, in 21:9. There, it introduces another vision concerning a woman, the antithetic character of the Great Whore of 17, i.e. the Bride of the Lamb.

Regarding the movement implied by ἦλθεν and δεῦρο, it is unclear whether the movement is oriented upwards or downwards.

Although, semantically, I would interpret the first (ἦλθεν) as the angel coming (down) to the Seer, the particle δεῦρο (17:1b), also implying movement⁵³¹ may suggest that the Seer is moving (up) in the direction of the angel, at the invitation of the latter.

The object of such an encounter is that the angel intends to 'show' –δείξω (17:1c) 'the judgment' –τὸ κρίμα 'of the Great Whore sitting on many waters' –τῆς πόρνῃς τῆς μεγάλης, τῆς καθημένης ἐπὶ ὑδάτων πολλῶν (17:1c).

In this way, our expectation as readers is not confirmed: we do not see the angel of the heptad carrying out judgment, just like previously. He merely shows (δείξω) it.

⁵²⁹ The divine revelation is mediated in a vision by intermediaries, who play an essential ubiquitous role in the apocalypses.

⁵³⁰ Since angels have been connected with interpretation, the expression *angelus interpretes* (lit. *the interpreting angel*) has been coined. (Michael Stone *Apocalyptic Literature*, in: idem (ed.), *Jewish Writings of the Second Temple Period. Apocrypha, Pseudepigrapha, Qumran Sectarian Writings, Philo, Josephus*, (Compendia Rerum Iudaicarum ad Novum Testamentum, vol 2: Van Gorcum, Arsen), Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984, 383-441, 383).

Interpreting angels become frequent with later prophets such as Ezekiel (40:3-44:4), Daniel (7:16; 8:16-19; 9:22; 10:14) and Zechariah (chapters 1-6). Such books feature angels who assist the respective prophets in understanding the visions of divine origin.

⁵³¹ Joannes P. Louw, Eugene A. Nida (eds.) *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament based on Semantic Domains*, (vol.1, 2nd ed.), New York: United Bible Societies, 1988, 1989, s.v. *Drunkness*, (§ 88.283-88.288), 723.

It can be inferred the angel in question does not have an active role in effecting the judgment: God is the one giving judgment over her –ἐκρινεν ὁ θεὸς τὸ κρίμα, 18:20 (cf. 19:2). He merely shows⁵³² the Seer what is God-given.

The interpretation of mysteries provides the semantic context⁵³³ in which this verb operates.⁵³⁴ Such an interpretative path actually anticipates the nature of the Whore's identity.

The judgment of the Great Whore

The judgment of the Great Whore –τὸ κρίμα τῆς πόρνῃς τῆς μεγάλης 17:1c –is the object of this enterprise, the core of our text.

Inferring from the future form of the verb (δείξω), the judgment is envisaged as an event expected.

However, such an understanding would be rendered quite ambiguous especially if I relate it later in my analysis with following intratexts⁵³⁵ in the Apocalypse. In this manner, her sentence appears to be a past event, an event already accomplished.

The judgment –τὸ κρίμα repeats an already familiar motif of the Apocalypse, which frequently associates with divine agency (cf. 14:7, 16:7, 19:2, 18:10.20, and 20:4). Its cognates, such as κρίνω and κρίσις appear mostly after the seven bowls (18:8.20, 19:2.11, 20:12-13, cf. 11:8). The ones targeted are the Beast, the Whore and the dead.⁵³⁶

Proclaiming divine judgment(s) is an extension of God's attributes.

In judging, God is righteous –δίκαιος (16:5) and mighty –ἰσχυρός (18:8). The judgments are carried out in righteousness –ἐν δικαιοσύνῃ κρίνει (19:11), being effected according to deeds – κατὰ τὰ ἔργα (18:6, cf. 20:12-13), or because of avenging the blood of God's servants – ἐξεδίκησεν τὸ αἷμα τῶν δούλων αὐτοῦ (19:2).

These act as a response to the summoning formulated in 6:9-10, when the souls of those who had been slaughtered for the word of God and for the testimony they had given –τὰς ψυχὰς τῶν ἐσφαγμένων διὰ τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ διὰ τὴν μαρτυρίαν ἣν εἶχον (6:9) cried

⁵³² In the Apocalypse, the verb δείκνυμι occurs eight times (1:1, 4:1, 17:1, 21:9.10; 22:1.6.8) having as subject always an *angelus interpres*. (Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 928).

⁵³³ Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, 426; Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 928.

⁵³⁴ It could be compared with 3 Bar. 2:6 "And the angel of the powers said to me, Come, and I will show thee the mysteries of God."

⁵³⁵ The intratexts I refer to comprise the judgment anticipation in 14:8, or 16:19, or as well as its accomplishment in 18:2 and acclamation in 18:20 (cf. 19:2). These references pertain to the Whore, further identified as 'Babylon' (17:5), 'the great city' (17:18).

⁵³⁶ Matthew Streett, *Here Comes the Judge: Violent Pacifism in the Book of Revelation* (The Library of New Testament Studies), London, New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2012, ft. 86, 210.

out with a loud voice "Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long will it be before you judge and avenge our blood on the inhabitants of the earth?" –ἕως πότε, ὁ δεσπότης ὁ ἅγιος καὶ ἀληθινός, οὐ κρίνεις καὶ ἐκδικεῖς τὸ αἷμα ἡμῶν ἐκ τῶν κατοικούντων ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς; (6:10).

In view of the above, God's judgments (αἱ κρίσεις) are delineated by the following adjectives, translated by "true and righteous" –ἀληθινὰ καὶ δίκαια αὐτοῦ (19:2, cf. 16:5.7). Considering the ethical context within which these operate one can then clearly understand the reason behind the Greek text consistent mentioning of judgment and justice, and not of 'punishment'.⁵³⁷

Additionally, in the Apocalypse, divine judgment takes place on 'the great day of wrath' –ἡ ἡμέρα ἡ μεγάλη τῆς ὀργῆς as in 6:17.⁵³⁸ It comprises the wrath of God (15:7) materialized either in wine of God's wrath (14:10) –ὁ οἶνος τοῦ θυμοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ, or wine press of God's wrath (14:19) –ἡ ληνὸς τοῦ θυμοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ, or the seven golden bowls filled with God's wrath (15:7) –ἑπτὰ φιάλας χρυσᾶς γεμούσας τοῦ θυμοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ.

In view of the nature and extent of divine judgment as shown in the Apocalypse, what follows will bear not only an important print on the one to be judged. Everything or more exactly anything about to unfold before the Seer's eyes is commissioned and carried out in a divine fashion, well deserved and potentially cathartic for the readership.

Some of these aspects will be further taken up and analyzed in detail, especially with generic relevance to the manner in which the Great Whore has been punished.

Further, we reach at the core of our analysis, i.e. the mysterious figure of the Great Whore –ἡ πόρνη ἡ μεγάλη –sitting by/near/on many waters –τῆς καθημένης ἐπὶ ὑδάτων πολλῶν in 17:1c.

The referent –τῆς πόρνης τῆς μεγάλης is a genitive construction pertaining to the judgment (τὸ κρίμα). The two genitives are interpreted differently:⁵³⁹ the first genitive (τῆς πόρνης) is an objective genitive, the second, a descriptive genitive (τῆς μεγάλης).

The objective genitive construction revolving around Whore –πόρνη bears two distinctive marks: one is the definite article ἡ in the genitive and the other is the adjective μεγάλη.

The definite article could be interpreted in two ways: it could simply point to the formation of the genitive, referring, in this case, to an instance pertaining to an introduction of a (new) character. Conversely, the article can establish textually an anaphoric reference to the subsequent uses as in 17:5.15.16 and 19:2.

⁵³⁷ Schüssler-Fiorenza, *Vision of a Just World*, 95.

⁵³⁸ The NT context, in which divine judgment as wrath has a strong eschatological component is supported by the intertextual connections with Luke 21:23, Rom 5:9, Eph 2:3, Col 3:6.

⁵³⁹ Cf. Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 928-929, also Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 848.

Judging by the fact that up until now no similar reference to any character identified as ‘the Great Whore’ was made, one could then infer that the definite article accompanying the noun πόρνη may actually point out the fact that John’s original readership could have easily deciphered the identity of the Whore, which remains elusive for the modern reader.⁵⁴⁰

Even more so, the subsequent titles or names associated with the Whore, namely ‘Babylon’ –Βαβυλών (v. 5) and ‘city’ –πόλις (v.18), both accompanied by the adjective great –μεγάλη form an intratextual link with 14:8. Here the judgment over Babylon is proclaimed –ἔπεσεν ἔπεσεν Βαβυλὼν ἡ μεγάλη.

In view of these links, attempts at identifying the character were made concluding with a political identification of ‘Babylon’ with Rome.

Such attempts are in my view much too early established by an academic scholarship employing a historical-critical approach to the text.

An early identification to what ‘Babylon’ is, namely a city does not, on the one hand correspond textually to the perception we get at this point as readers from the text. The appellative ‘Babylon’ occurs at an ulterior moment in the presentation of the Great Whore. Up to that point, the character was called both ‘whore’ and ‘woman’.

On the other hand, as soon as Babylon is equated with Rome, the politicizing of the gendered image is endured. As such, the direction in the exegetical analysis is compromised. The choice described above bears thus an aggravating influence on the manner in which we assess the triple metaphorical levels of the gendered image in question.

It would dictate an immediate and all too familiar intertextual identification with some of the OT prophetic texts. Such an early identification would automatically opt for a non-literal understanding of ‘prostitution’, and by extension of ‘prostitute’.

In this manner, the image complex of the Great Whore loses a significant amount of its metaphorical content.

We encounter textually the referent πόρνη as the designator for the character’s judgment. This appellative is used subsequently, either directly (17:5. 15. 16, 19:2), or by reference to cognates of it such as πορνεία (17:2.4, 19:2), πορνεύω (17:2, 18:3.9), as well as by means of pronominal possession (17: 2.4.16, 18:3).

⁵⁴⁰ Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, 426.

The definition of the “whore” and the meaning of “whoring” are core issues in the current study. With this appellative, we reached the first layer of the metaphorical composition surrounding the character of the Great Whore.

A Biblically relevant definition conceives a ‘whore’ in terms of “a woman who practices sexual immorality as a profession”, being expressed idiomatically for example, as ‘one who acts like a she-dog’, ‘one who sells her vulva’, one who sells herself’, ‘one who receives any man’.⁵⁴¹

This behaviour has been consistently rebuked throughout the Bible. Some examples include Deut 22:28ff, Acts 15:20.29: 21:25, 1 Cor 6:12-20⁵⁴², Matt 15:19, Mark 7:2, Rom 1:29, Gal 5:19, Rev 9:21.⁵⁴³

‘Fornicating’ –πορνεύω belongs to the same semantic field like ‘committing adultery’ –μοιχεύω. The second term involves the breaking of the covenantal connection between spouses, acting thus against the sacredness and permanency of the family.

Different expression of fornication and adultery can be taken literally⁵⁴⁴ and non-literally, that is spiritually.⁵⁴⁵ In the second case, these refer to spiritual infidelity to the Lord, especially via the connection with the idolatrous cults as depicted in OT (1 Kgs 14:24, cf. 15:12; 22:38.47).⁵⁴⁶

The abundance of sexual-charged imagery in the Apocalypse as a whole is well documented textually. Early in the Apocalypse, in the seven messages, practicing fornication and/or committing adultery (μοιχεύω) are evoked in 2:14. 20-22 (such terms are repeated in 9:21, 14:8, 17:2, 4, 18:3, 9, 19:2, 21:8, 22:15). There is usually a traditional distinction between the two uses as presented in the following.

Apocalypse notes a figurative use of sexual-related imagery as a “power hostile to God and God’s people in 17:1.5.15.16, 19:2”⁵⁴⁷

⁵⁴¹ Louw-Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon*, s.v. πόρνη (§ 88.275), 771-772.

⁵⁴² Madeleine S. Miller, J. Lane Miller, s.v. Harlot, in: eadem, *Harper’s Bible dictionary*, New York: Harper & Row, 1973, 245-246, 246.

⁵⁴³ Sals, *Die Biographie*, 88.

⁵⁴⁴ The transgression involving engaging in adulterous behavior (μοιχάω) is discouraged in NT in Matt 5:27f. 32, 19:9, Mark 10:11.12, Luke 16:18, John 8:4, Rom 2:22.

⁵⁴⁵ Taken as infidelity shown to God, fornication is very common with Jer 3:6-10; Ezek 16:15-22, 23:1-49; Hos 4:12-13 5:3, when referring to the unfaithful Israel, being most often conceived of in marital or covenantal terms (Lev 17:7, 20:5-6; Num 14:33, 15:39; Deut 31:16; Judg 2:17, 8:27, 1 Chr 5:25, 2 Chr 21:11, Psalm 73:27). As such, it occurs in Isaiah (1:21) Hosea (1:2, 2:4, 4:15, 9:1), Jeremiah (2:20, 3:2.9.13, 5:7.11, 13:27), Ezekiel (6:9, 16, 23, 43:7.9).

⁵⁴⁶ Robin Parry, Prostitution, in: Joel B. Green et al. (eds.), *Dictionary of Scripture and Ethics*, Grand Rapids: Baker Publishing Group, 2011, 639-641, 640.

⁵⁴⁷ Trebilco, *The Early Christians in Ephesus*, 545 (ft. 164).

Trebilco notes fornication features in “the exceptional literal use in vice lists such as in 9:21, 21:8, and 22:15.”⁵⁴⁸

The current study, due to its gender-related content aims at critically assessing the nature of fornication as depicted in Rev 17. Thus I embrace, rather than gloss over the sexual content of the semantic field repeated excessively in the vision of the Great Whore.

Additionally, besides different terms denoting fornication and prostitution, images with sexual content are often contrasted with images of purity, including references to *virgins* (14:4), *pure bride* (19:7-8, 21:1-2, 21:9), *the steadfast* (22:7).

It is my contention, that fornication and adultery images reach their climax in the Whore vision. These are initiated in the epistolary proclamations of the first part of the Apocalypse, which are connected thematically and intratextually with the Great Prostitute of chapter 17.

In particular, the epistolary proclamations I am interested in occur specifically 2:20-22. In the community of Thyatira, a gendered character, identified symbolically as Jezebel, a self-entitled prophet –ἡ λέγουσα ἑαυτὴν προφῆτιν (2:20) has her deeds –τὰ ἔργα catalogued as adulteries –τοὺς μοιχεύοντας in 2:22, although she is not textually named ‘prostitute’.

The larger context in which the sexual image of adulteries operate encompasses Jezebel’s activity of teaching and leading [God’s] bond-servants astray –διδάσκει καὶ πλανᾷ τοὺς [ἐμοὺς] δούλους, so that they commit acts of immorality –πορνεῦσαι and eat from what was sacrificed to idols –καὶ φαγεῖν εἰδωλόθυτα (2:20).

Although the critique against Jezebel targets possibly a real contemporary persona of the Seer’s,⁵⁴⁹ ‘Jezebel’ is here a symbolic name, just as later ‘Babylon’ is.

The original Jezebel, the foreign wife of Ahab, queen of the Northern kingdom has been a notorious person. Some of her ignominious acts consisted of persecuting the prophets (1 Kgs 18:4), bringing foreign gods to be worshipped (1 Kgs 18:19), being accused of harlotries and sorceries” (2 Kgs 9:22).⁵⁵⁰

Since her deeds were against God’s chosen ones, negative associations have been attached to her name.

By using similar images and phrases, the Seer is constructing in the Apocalypse the profile of the womanly-faced evil. The accusations brought to the Whore comprise ‘whoring’ (17:2.3), ‘deceiving’ (18:23) and ‘drinking blood’ (17:6).

⁵⁴⁸ Trebilco, *The Early Christians in Ephesus*, 545 (ft. 164).

⁵⁴⁹ Sutter Rehmann, *Die Offenbarung Johannes*, 727; cf. Paul B. Duff, *Who Rides the Beast?*, 89.

⁵⁵⁰ Gale Yee, Art. Jezebel, in: David Noel Freedman (ed.), *Anchor Bible Dictionary* (vol. 3), New York: Doubleday, 848-849, 848.

As soon as textual pieces of information gather, the actual connection with Jezebel can be extended far beyond the generic aspect. One could safely assert that the other markers, such as idol worshipping could possibly prompt a secondary referential context, which will be further enlarged by references to OT.

Establishing intratextual as well as intertextual connections with the ancient Sidonian queen serves to confirm further the horizon of expectation of the reader. Not only that the real Jezebel once paid with her life for the transgressions against the people of God (1 Kgs 18:21-26) and the apocalyptic Jezebel was threatened with death, so the judgment of the Great Whore will most likely imply losing her life tragically, as it will be confirmed textually in 17:16.

One should however note that the demise of Jezebel in the Apocalypse is never described or witnessed; it is only implied as part of the destruction of all God's opposing forces in Rev 19.⁵⁵¹ The connection regarding her demise can only be established via the OT references. Moreover, I would like to point out that according to textual information, Jezebel's adulteries result into two abominations, i.e. fornication and consuming food sacrificed to idols, a nuance many exegetes⁵⁵² do not discern. As a result, eating εἰδωλόθυτα as an explanation occurs as an explanation to what fornication stands for.

If these references are not kept and analyzed separately, it can result, very early in my analysis into a change of focus as I have previously stressed. As a result, the corporeal meaning of prostitution subsides then in favour of the economic-political associations, which are though relevant for the OT context, they are at this point, too premature to establish and evaluate.

As stated earlier, the Great Whore is accompanied by the descriptive adjective ἡ μεγάλη (cf. 17:1c, 19:2) having multiple references.⁵⁵³

⁵⁵¹ Marla Selvidge, *Powerful and Powerless Women in the Apocalypse. A Conflict of Passions*, in: Marla J. Selvidge, *Woman, Violence and the Bible, Studies in Women and Religion* (vol. 37) New York: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1996, 117-128, 120.

⁵⁵² Among them, Brian K. Blount, *Revelation. A Commentary* (New Testament Library), Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009, 312, Paul B. Duff, *Wolves in Sheep's Clothing. Literary Opposition and Social Tension in the Revelation of John*, in: David L. Barr, *Reading the Book of Revelation. A Resource for Students*, Leiden/Boston, Brill, 2004, 65-80, 72.

⁵⁵³ For all the references, cf. Louw/Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon* s.v. μέγας, μεγάλη, μέγα. The adjective implies variety of uses and reference among which references to *a large quantity*, §59.22, 597, §78.2, 685; *a large size, a reference to dimensions* §79.123, 706; *being great in terms of status*, §87.22, 736; *pertaining to being surprising in terms in view of being important*, §25.207, 311.

Interestingly enough, this adjective occurs frequently⁵⁵⁴ in the Apocalypse mostly within auditions and visions,⁵⁵⁵ describing nouns such as φωνή (5:2.12: 6:10: 7:2.10; 8:13; 10:3; 14:7.19. 15. 18; 16:17; 19:17) and χάλαζα (11:19). These instances are translated by “strong” –μάχαιρα (6:4), respectively “great” and “heavy”.⁵⁵⁶ The adjective also determines the nouns ἡ πόλις (16:19, 17:18, 18:10.16.18, 19) and Βαβυλῶν (14:8, 17:5, 18:2.21), where is translated as “great”.

Regarding its usage within the Great Whore vision, I would like to make two remarks. Considering the three dimensions of the gendered appearance I mentioned in the previous section, namely ‘whore’, ‘woman’, ‘city’, the adjective μεγάλη accompanies ‘whore’ twice (see above) and the city ‘Babylon’ (17:5.18 cf. 14:8, 16:19 also 18:2.10.16.18.19.21). It never appears as a characteristic of the ‘woman’ or of ‘fornication’.⁵⁵⁷

In order to denote the intimate association between ‘great’ and ‘whore’ in German, the word ‘Erzhure’⁵⁵⁸ was coined translated in English by ‘archwhore’.⁵⁵⁹

Since the adjective applies to the city (and) Babylon, it points to the *greatness, power and importance*, underlined in hints to the royalty, presumptuousness, and heavenliness of the Whore (cf. Rev 18).

All these are uncharacteristic of the Whore’s counterpart, i.e. the Bride of the Lamb.⁵⁶⁰

Seated upon many waters

It can also mean *surprising, strange*, cf. θαῦμα μέγα; *important persons* (οἱ μεγάλοι only in the plural, persons of important or high status), §87.40, 738; ὁ μεγιστάν, μέγιστος, *pertaining to being very important*, §65.53, 627, also in the plural, §87.41 cf. §87.40.

⁵⁵⁴ The NT records 194 occurrences of the various adjectival forms of μέγας, μεγάλη, μέγα, out of which 80 appear solely in the Apocalypse (Sals, *Die Biographie*, 85).

⁵⁵⁵ Sals, *Die Biographie*, 85.

⁵⁵⁶ To render the English equivalents of the mentioned words, I currently use the translations found in the NRSV.

⁵⁵⁷ Sals, *Die Biographie*, 85 (ft. 120).

⁵⁵⁸ R. Bergmeier, Die Erzhure und das Tier: Apk 12,18-13,18 und 17f.: Eine quellen- und redaktionskritische Analyse, in: *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt: Geschichte und Kultur Roms im Spiegel der neueren Forschung* II 25.5/1988, 3899-3916, cf. Sals, *Die Biographie*, 85.

⁵⁵⁹ Cf. Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Explorations in Theology (Vol. 2): The Spouse of the Word* (trans. John Saward), San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1991.

⁵⁶⁰ Sals, *Die Biographie*, 86.

Further information is provided in the portrayal of the Great Whore. She is described as “seated upon many waters” –καθήμενη ἐπὶ ὑδάτων πολλῶν.

I evaluate the previously analyzed adjective as well the topographical reference as pertaining to the Whore’s static description.

Variants of the participial construction τῆς καθήμενης feature elsewhere in the Apocalypse. The posture is mentioned with “the one sitting on the throne” –ὁ καθήμενος ἐπὶ τῷ θρόνῳ⁵⁶¹ (4:2; 7:1.15; 21:5).

These occurrences indicate a delineation of God’s power and imply worship given by the living creatures (4:9), twenty four elders (4:10), as well as creatures (5:13) as their only salvation (7:10).⁵⁶² Sitting on the throne would also connote with a “rule of mercy, justice and righteousness (e.g. Isa 16:5).”⁵⁶³

An eschatological dimension⁵⁶⁴ is associated to the image of sitting on a throne, namely of God sitting as judge.⁵⁶⁵

The Great Whore as the focal point of chapters 17-18 also associates concepts of ‘rule’ and ‘power’ in Rev 18:17 “κάθημαι βασίλισσα” (I sit as queen).

It could be inferred by this association that the Whore may be imitating God.⁵⁶⁶ Moreover, given the fact she is judged may open up a variety of interpretative possibilities for her actual situation. These could include perhaps expectations of some sort of abuse of power, intolerable before God.

⁵⁶¹ If we are go further, we may compare it with the Book of Acts 7:56, where Stephen has a vision of the Son of Man “ἐστῶτα” at the right hand of the Father. Jesus is referring to the same instance as “ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου καθήμενος ἐκ δεξιῶν τῆς δυνάμεως τοῦ θεοῦ” (Luke 22:69), something which Col 3:1 attributes to Christ “ὁ Χριστός ἐστιν ἐν δεξιᾷ τοῦ θεοῦ καθήμενος”. In the Apocalypse, the reference to the ‘one who sits on the throne’ appears 12 times.

⁵⁶² Christianne Zimmermann, *Die Namen des Vaters. Studien zu ausgewählten neutestamentlichen Gottesbezeichnungen vor ihrem frühjüdischen und paganen Sprachhorizont* (Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity, vol. 69), Leiden: Brill, 2007, 263. She suggests that the scene of throne room is an idealized projection of the Roman court ceremonial. (Christiane Zimmermann, *Die Namen des Vaters*, 264; also Streett, *Here Comes the Judge*, 58; Witherington, *Revelation*, 123; Craig Koester, *Revelation and the End of All Things*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001, 75).

⁵⁶³ Räßle, *The Metaphor of the City*, 78-79.

⁵⁶⁴ John 12:15 associates the image of the coming king with ‘sitting’.

⁵⁶⁵ Sals, *Die Biographie*, 135; Streett, *Here Comes the Judge*. He conceives the heptads (seals, trumpets, and bowls) as manifestations of God’s power as eschatological judge, cf. *Judgment*, in: Leland Ryken et al. (eds.), *Dictionary of Biblical Image*, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1998, 470-474, esp. 472f.

⁵⁶⁶ Rossing, *The Choice*, 67. She conceives the posture as a deliberate contrast to the enthroned God (Rev 4) such as in 4:2.9-10, 5:1.7.13, 6:16, 7:10.15, 19:4, 20:11, 21:5.

The preposition ἐπί has a spatial significance having the meaning “on, upon” (Matt 9:9; 14:25, Luke 22:30; Rev 3:20),⁵⁶⁷ but Aune suggest to translate it as “beside, by” (Matt 21:19, John 21:1), given the impossibility of “how is one to visualize the whore on many waters”.⁵⁶⁸

I would prefer to preserve the first meaning of ἐπί as “on, upon”. This could probably match closely the intention of the narratorial voice to shock by presenting us a grandiose figure.

Subsequently, in view of the preceding participle, namely καθημένη, I understand “on, upon” to imply a relation of dominance.

This claim is supported by v.15 of the same chapter, where “many waters” upon which the Whore is sitting are interpreted as ‘peoples, crowds and nations and languages’ –λαοὶ καὶ ὄχλοι εἰσὶν καὶ ἔθνη καὶ γλῶσσαι.

Further, the relation of dominance implied by posture is further buttressed by v.18 of chapter 17, when the Whore is interpreted by the angel as ‘the great city’ having dominion over the kings of the earth –βασιλείαν ἐπὶ τῶν βασιλέων τῆς γῆς.

This relation is actually earlier alluded to, namely in v.2: the Whore’s “dominion” enslaves both kings of the earth –οἱ βασιλεῖς τῆς γῆς as well as inhabitants of the earth –οἱ κατοικοῦντες τὴν γῆν.⁵⁶⁹

Besides the political dominance implied by 17:18 her location is very important from an economical point of view. The Whore’s position implies unlimited means of transport, the ability of uniting logistically many places. In view of these, ‘waters’ could potentially imply dissolution of boundaries, just as the desert (17:3) will.⁵⁷⁰

In the line with commercial undertones, ‘prostitution’ possibly stems from the verb πέρνημι, translated as ‘to sell abroad, to export, to sell as slave on the sea’.⁵⁷¹ The noun ἡ πόρνη could be understood as ‘as the one bought abroad’⁵⁷², or as ‘the buyable’.

⁵⁶⁷ Louw-Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon*, s.v. ἐπί; ἐν; εἰς, § 83.23, §83.47, 716.

⁵⁶⁸ Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 907.

⁵⁶⁹ Cf. the following subsection (17:2).

⁵⁷⁰ Sals, *Die Biographie*, 93.

⁵⁷¹ Leslie Kurke, *Coins, Bodies, Games, and Gold. The Politics of Meaning in Archaic Greece*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999, 178.

⁵⁷² Stavroula Leontsini, *Die Prostitution im frühen Byzanz* (Dissertationen der Universität Wien 194), Wien: VWGÖ, 1989, 22-25; cf. Edward E. Cohen, *Free and Unfree Sexual Work: An Economic Analysis of Athenian Prostitution*, in: Christopher A. Faraone, Laura K. McClure (eds.), *Prostitutes and Courtesans in the Ancient World*, 95-124, 103-108.

However, an interesting observation shows that nowhere in the Apocalypse is the Whore depicted as 'bought', or having the status of a 'slave'. No mention of any earnings for sexual favours is also encountered.⁵⁷³

On the contrary, the Whore is luxuriously dressed (vv.3-4), rules over the kings of the earth (v.18) and is portrayed as main supplier of any merchandise that can be commercialized (18: 11-13).

Actually, other groups of people become rich by associating with her (cf. 18:3.9.11.15.19) – especially with the city dimension of the gendered metaphor discussed.⁵⁷⁴

The explanation given later in v.15 to the 'many waters' in conjunction with the association of the 'waters' with groups of 'peoples' seems to correspond with the OT images of threat as depicted in Psalm 144:7. Here the Psalmist addresses a supplication to God, to save him from the mighty waters, out of the hand of aliens –ἐξ ὑδάτων πολλῶν ἐκ χειρὸς υἱῶν ἄλλοτριῶν.

It could also resonate as well with instances of punishment effected by God by means of waters described in Isa 8:6-7, 17:12-14; 28:17, Jer 47:2.

Water in the Apocalypse may be both positive and negative.

In Rev 12:15, the woman pursued by the dragon escapes only because the earth has opened its mouth and swollen the water like a river –ὕδωρ ὡς ποταμόν, whereas in the last chapter of the Apocalypse (22:17), the water of life –ὕδωρ ζωῆς is offered as a gift.

However, given the actual context where 'great waters' operate and considering all the associations established so far, one could infer that 'waters' here tend toward a negative connotation.

The operating context can also be extended textually, namely to the Whore being depicted as 'sitting on a beast' (17:3) –καθημένη ἐπὶ θηρίον κόκκινον and to the 'beast rising out from the sea' –ἐκ τῆς θαλάσσης θηρίον ἀναβαῖνον in 13:1. Such images are used to depict enemies of God.

Leaving aside the Biblical context, another implication ascribed to 'waters' in contemporary times commonly designates the negative picture of the super-powerful, namely of the 'feminine super-powerful'.⁵⁷⁵ This connotation has sexual implications.

⁵⁷³ Sutter Rehmann, *Die Offenbarung Johannes*, 735.

⁵⁷⁴ Sals, *Die Biographie*, 89.

⁵⁷⁵ Klaus Theweleit, *Männerphantasien* (2 vols.), Stromfeld: Roter Stern Verlag, 1977-1978, here vol. 1, 236-297.

Nevertheless, I evaluate the above observation as an over-sexualized reading of the topographic dimension, as with Marla Selvidge:

*As in every other passage involving a metaphor or image of a woman, the writer is interested in her sexual abilities and influences. She seems to have an unquenchable sexual desire which extends to all of the nations.*⁵⁷⁶

An interpretation such as the above is an example of reading-in the Biblical text, with little textual support.

References to sexuality taken *ad literam* are extremely important in contouring the corporeal dimension of the Great Whore in 17:1.

Both the ‘whore’ and the ‘waters’ are described by adjectives in 17:1c, which seem to be semantically related⁵⁷⁷ i.e. the *waters* are πολλοί and the *whore* is μεγάλη. When translated into English, μεγάλη becomes “great” and πολλοί is translated as “many”.

The difference between the two semantically related adjectives seems even more ambiguous in translating, when we analyze in context the genitival phrase ὑδάτων πολλῶν, translated by “many waters”.

To exemplify, πολύς is rendered in OT by the adjective “mighty” (2 Sam 22:17, Psalm 18:16, 29:3, 32:6, 93:4, 144:7), implying a negative connotation, an instance when God’s power is shown overcoming threatening forces of the disorder, chaos. By contrast, the same adjective is translated in the Revelation with “many” (cf. 1:15, 14:2, 19:6).

Taken as a whole, the phrase “ἐπὶ ὑδάτων πολλῶν” echoes the text of Jer 28:13 in which, the reference to the city of Babylon (!) ἐφ’ ὕδασι πολλοῖς⁵⁷⁸ is part of the doom oracle against the unrepentant city.

This intertextual connection will be explored in the following section dealing with the Great Whore’s name, i.e. Babylon featuring in v.5.

Further, the locative “ἐπὶ ὑδάτων πολλῶν” seems to be quite ambiguous, when we compare it to the other references in the same chapter pertaining to the Great Whore.

Although every time referred to as ‘sitting’ –καθήμενη, the location of the Whore in 17:3 is no longer ‘upon many waters’, but ‘on a scarlet beast’ –ἐπὶ θηρίον κόκκινον, and in Rev 17:9, she is depicted as ‘sitting on seven hills’ –ἐπτά ὄρη εἰσὶν, ὅπου ἡ γυνὴ κάθεται ἐπ’ αὐτῶν.

⁵⁷⁶ Selvidge, *Powerful and Powerless Women*, 163f.

⁵⁷⁷ Louw-Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon* explains πολύς, πολλή, πολύ (§59.1) as the upper range of a scale of extent, but probably somehow less than for μέγας, μεγάλη, μέγα (§78.3), 685. Cf. the coming explanation of the genitive ὑδάτων πολλῶν (17:1).

⁵⁷⁸ Here, the NAS version uses “mighty” to render the adjective.

This evidences also the fact that with apocalyptic imagery, the fluidity of depicted images is high, so multiple referents can describe one entity.

This is an example how exactly Apocalypse operates with tensive⁵⁷⁹ multivalent symbols.

The definite article in the genitive (τῆς) preceding the 'whore' (ἡ πόρνη), as well as the determiner 'great' (μεγάλη) and the precise reference to her location –ἐπὶ ὑδάτων πολλῶν could allude to the fact that the Seer may have had someone or something in mind to whom such a description could be applicable.

In this case, the symbolic usage of such words, as well as the preference for description rather than naming could have been possibly dictated by some kind of external censorship.

Stylistically, as mentioned previously, the phrasing of 17:1 appears verbatim in 21:9 to introduce again a text regarding a woman –the wife of the Lamb: Καὶ ἦλθεν εἷς ἐκ τῶν ἑπτὰ ἀγγέλων [] καὶ ἐλάλησεν μετ' ἐμοῦ λέγων· δεῦρο, δείξω σοι τὴν νύμφην τὴν γυναῖκα τοῦ ἀρνίου (21:9). This is clearly antithetical suggesting that the Harlot is thus, the demonic counterfeit of the Bride of Christ.

⁵⁷⁹ Schüssler-Fiorenza enlarges on the purpose of the use of tensive symbols in the following: "the multivalent images and tensive symbols of Revelation elicit emotions, feelings, and convictions that cannot, and should not, be fully conceptualized" (Schüssler-Fiorenza, *Vision of a Just World*, 31). In view of this cf. Boring's definition: "A tensive symbol, [...] sets up tension in the mind [...] and by involving the hearer-reader in the act of communication convey a surplus of meaning that cannot be reduced to propositional language, or to one level of meaning" (M. E. Boring, *Revelation-Interpretation*, Kentucky: John Knox, 1989, 57).

1.2 Provisional Assessment (1)

The negative connotation of the elements featured in the description of the Great Whore is contained in each semantic unit.

The first verse forms a superscript for the entire chapter.⁵⁸⁰ It introduces the theme of the chapter, namely that of ‘the judgment of the Great Whore’.

I pursued the analysis by breaking down the larger unit into smaller subunits and analyzed them verse by verse.

The exegetical analysis was pertinent to a text-oriented approach, but also included the reader component in the reading process.

By this strategy, I aimed at reducing some anticipations ensuing from the intertextual associations with the OT as much as possible. Such an option remains, in my view, adequate to reader’s actual pace, who gains information as the narration unfolds, permanently looking intratextually into what was previously read, rather than anticipating what follows.

Ignoring the importance of such an approach would result into an interlocking reading. Overemphasizing the secondary intertexts can dictate over the course of the analysis, resulting into a gloss over the corporeal generic component of the metaphor of the Great Whore, as I have amply evidenced.

I started by placing the subunit within the general framework of the Apocalypse that receives anchoring points in the character of the *angel*—his identity and affiliation with the angels conducting the plagues of the last heptad, as well as in the thematic component, namely of *judgment*, predominant with the previous sections.

Slowly, the reader’s general horizon of expectation receives contours, waiting to be confirmed or infirmed by what will follow.

The one, whose judgment we are about to witness, is introduced as the ‘Great Whore’, followed by a topographical reference.

Therefore, the first verse of chapter 17 evidences the perspective of the potential⁵⁸¹ accuser (angel as emissary of God), as well as witness (the Seer, John), but never of the *accused* (the Great Whore). The masculine perspective dominating the entire section is relevant from a gender-informed optic, for it is rooted in an androcentric cultural system.

⁵⁸⁰ Alan Johnson, Art. Revelation, in: *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary (Hebrews-Revelation vol. 12)*, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1981, 399-603, 555.

⁵⁸¹ The choice for “potential” is prompted by the fact that in the Apocalypse, angels are carrying out the divine sanctions. The act judging does not pertain to them; it is of divine origin, an attribute of the ‘one who sits on the throne’.

The sexual identification of the character is permeated by an androcentric perspective. Following this, the 'whore' is inscribed in a contrasting stereotypical system of shame.

Additionally, the intratextual associations such as those referring to Jezebel (2:20-22) corroborated with the intertextual ones adduce a spiritual extension to whoring, namely idolatry.

A possible economic aspect confirmed further by the topographical reference bearing political undertones highlighted that the character of the Whore is a delineation of evil. The Great Whore appears as gendered, her posture imitates God and possibly, for this reason, she is punished.

The resemblance with Jezebel automatically sets the Whore is an antithesis with the Bride of the Lamb (21:9). This opposition entails an ethical dimension.

To explicate the generic contrast between the sexually pure (represented by the Great Whore) and the impure (represented by the Bride of the Lamb), the phrasing of 17:1 is identical with the Bride's introduction in chapter 21. Here (most probably) the same angel will show the Seer τὴν νύμφην τὴν γυναῖκα τοῦ ἀρνίου –the Bride, the wife of the Lamb.

This parallel will be developed, once the elements pertaining to the description of the Whore will gather to form the contrast even more pregnant.

1.3 Reasons for Judgment

17:2a		μεθ’	ἧς	ἐπόρνευσαν	οἱ βασιλεῖς	τῆς γῆς
17:2b	καὶ			ἐμεθύσθησαν	οἱ κατοικοῦντες	τὴν γῆν
				ἐκ τοῦ οἴνου		τῆς πορνείας

αὐτῆς.

(With whom the kings of the earth have fornicated and the inhabitants of the earth have been inebriated with the wine of her fornication)

The second verse of chapter 17 is evidencing, what I interpret as the reasons for the twofold indictment of the Whore. Described previously as “great” and “sitting on many waters”, the Great Whore is the one with whom the kings of the earth have fornicated and the inhabitants of the earth have become inebriated with the wine of her immorality –μεθ’ ἧς ἐπόρνευσαν οἱ βασιλεῖς τῆς γῆς καὶ ἐμεθύσθησαν οἱ κατοικοῦντες τὴν γῆν ἐκ τοῦ οἴνου τῆς πορνείας αὐτῆς (17:2).

Her judgment will also conjoin with God’s remembering her sins piled up to heaven as in 18:5 (cf. 16:19) –ἐκολλήθησαν αὐτῆς αἱ ἁμαρτίαι ἄχρι τοῦ οὐρανοῦ καὶ ἐμνημόνευσεν ὁ θεὸς τὰ ἀδικήματα αὐτῆς.

The current verse is further contouring the Great Whore’s description. She was described visually as great –μεγάλη, and seated upon many waters –καθημένη ἐπὶ ὑδάτων πολλῶν, now, her actions speak on her behalf: she engages in ignominious acts (whoring, and drinking abuse), which could make her judgment justified.

As such, two groups of people are put in connection with the Great Whore –οἱ βασιλεῖς τῆς γῆς (17:2a) and οἱ κατοικοῦντες τὴν γῆν (17:2b).

From a syntactic point of view, 17:2a and b evidence a parallel construction.

Markers of this parallelism are the identical arranging of words in 17:2a and 2b, the coordinating conjunction καί, which is uniting two semantically equivalent units as well as the inversion of the subject with the verb. Especially the latter observation could emphasize the gravity of the actions evoked, rather than the actors.

By virtue of the phrasing, we notice a continuation of the sexually related language in this verse.

If in the first verse, the term 'whore' was mentioned only once, now in one single verse, three cognates of πόρν-: ἥς (deitic for πόρνη), ἐπόρνευσαν, and πορνείας occur. This overemphasis may suggest the gravity of her deeds and implicitly the just judgment on her. These act as to confirm our horizon of expectation.

Both 'whoring' and 'drinking' are part of the same group of condemnable actions, which account for the designation of the figure in 17:1b as 'whore'.

The Great Whore is defined through disgraceful liaisons with other(s), respectively οἱ βασιλεῖς τῆς γῆς and οἱ κατοικοῦντες τὴν γῆν. She can be called *prostitute* in view of her devious behaviour in relation to masculine (!) other(s).

Neither the kings, nor the inhabitants are described in detail, unlike the Whore previously. Instead, they are unidimensional, characterized by their actions: committing fornication (πορνεύω) and drinking abuse (μεθύω).

Both groups are described by the genitival construction 'of earth' –τῆς γῆς, respectively 'on earth' –τὴν γῆν, although each is differently involved with her –one, through fornication (οἱ βασιλεῖς [...] ἐπόρνευσαν, 17:2a), the other through drinking abuse (οἱ κατοικοῦντες [...] ἐμεθύσθησαν [...] ἐκ τοῦ οἴνου τῆς πορνείας αὐτῆς, 17:2b).

In view of what has been shown above, the descriptive adjective accompanying them, τῆς γῆς may be interpreted negatively at least at two levels.

In the Apocalypse, 'earth' as God's incomplete⁵⁸² creation could be seen as antithetical to 'heaven'. The former is the place where all the abominations related to humans take place. God's apocalyptic plagues, carried out by his angels affect primarily the earth, its fauna, flora, human life (6:4.8.10; 8:7; 9:3; 14:9; 16:18). Earth is where Satan was cast (12:7-9) the reign of the Beasts and dragon (13:4) *par excellence*, as well as the Whore's (17:18), who has corrupted the Earth with her immorality –ἐφθειρεν τὴν γῆν ἐν τῇ πορνείᾳ αὐτῆς (19:2).

Further, if we analyze grammatically the two aorist verbs in 17:2, the kings are the subject of the active verb ἐπόρνευσαν, i.e. fornicated (17:2a). The angel refers to the Whore passively (μεθ' ἥς).

With the inhabitants on the earth, the situation is opposite: they ἐμεθύσθησαν, i.e. were made drunk (17:2b). Here, the verb in the passive implies that the Whore played an active part: the intoxicating liquor belonged to her (ἐκ τοῦ οἴνου τῆς πορνείας αὐτῆς).

Such a phrasing may function as an excuse for the inhabitants.

⁵⁸² Cf. Tobias Nicklas, Freiheit oder Prädestination? Gedanken zum Menschenbild der Johannesapokalypse. Paper held during the Conference of Collegium Biblicum Lovaniense (23-25 July 2015), Leuven (no pagination).

At least with the inhabitants of the earth, the phrasing could be described as them requiring some sort of inebriation to follow the Whore, for such a state would imply losing clear mind (and eyes).

In this context, maybe ‘fornication’ could be explained as portraying a similar status to being drunk, at least in what concerns the end results.

Additionally, actions such as following the Whore inebriatedly could point to their temporality, or transience. Contrasted with the natural state of sobriety, the inhabitants’ loss of mind is but a mere aberration inflicted to them, short-termed by nature of things.

From a stylistical perspective overall, 18:3 is almost a verbatim repetition of 17:2.

In 18:3, the differences between the two excerpts are minor: the two groups involved with the Great Whore are enumerated in a different order, while the merchants are also added: “for all the nations have drunk of the wine of the wrath of her immorality, and the kings of the earth have committed *acts of* immorality with her, and the merchants of the earth have become rich by the wealth of her sensuality” –ὅτι ἐκ τοῦ οἴνου τοῦ θυμοῦ τῆς πορνείας αὐτῆς πέπωκαν πάντα τὰ ἔθνη καὶ οἱ βασιλεῖς τῆς γῆς μετ’ αὐτῆς ἐπόρνευσαν καὶ οἱ ἔμποροι τῆς γῆς ἐκ τῆς δυνάμεως τοῦ σπλήνους αὐτῆς ἐπλούτησαν.

The kings of the earth fornicated with her

The mention of the kings adduces significant data to the portrait of the Great Whore. As we may have inferred from the previous verse, her economic dominance implied by her location, gains now a political dimension.

The association with the kings involves throughout the Apocalypse, together with other semantically related words, such as ‘crowns’ (2:10, 3:11, 14:14) and ‘throne’ (4:10, 7:11, 11:16, 19:4) a reference to ‘power’, or ‘dominion’ –ἐξουσία as in 2:26, 9:3, 11:6, 13:2.4.12, 14:18, 16:9, 17:12.13, 18:1, 20:6.

This presumption is confirmed in the last verse of the chapter 17: the Whore has “dominion over the kings of the earth” (17:18), delineating further the type of association existing between the Whore and the kings of the earth.

In view of the political dimension of this association, the corporeal aspect, delineated by πορνεία is again overlooked in favour of a non-literal interpretation⁵⁸³ of sexual promiscuity.

⁵⁸³ Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, 427.

This happens quite hastily and can be at this level submitted under scrutiny.

Earlier in my analysis, I contended that the Whore's posture and name containing the adjective μεγάλη might allude to having some sort of influence.

This intuition seems to be confirmed in view of her connections with "the kings of the earth".

However, considering the relationship between the Whore and the kings, the opposite can also be argued: despite being active in higher societal circles, she is only a whore, when defined in relationship with the kings.

Except for this mentioning, there are two more instances in Rev 18, where the association between the Whore and the kings is defined as 'fornication' –πορνεία (18:3.9).

In 18:9, excerpt for fornication, the kings of the earth are also accused of having lived in luxury (οἱ βασιλεῖς τῆς γῆς οἱ μετ' αὐτῆς πορνεύσαντες καὶ στερηνιάσαντες), rendered by the verb "στερνιάω", which has the following explanation "to live sensually by gratifying the senses with sexual immorality".⁵⁸⁴ The same verb will appear in connection with the merchants (18:3).

Referring to these intratexts, namely 17:2, 18: 3.9, is interesting to note how fornicating with the kings of the earth –ἐπόρνευσαν οἱ βασιλεῖς τῆς γῆς (17:2), becomes living sensually with her (the same kings of the earth) –οἱ βασιλεῖς τῆς γῆς οἱ μετ' αὐτῆς πορνεύσαντες (18:9) and in 19:2 meaning "corrupting" all earth –ἔφθειρεν τὴν γῆν ἐν τῇ πορνείᾳ αὐτῆς. It could be this is pointing to the additional economic dimensions, as well as ethical implications of sexual imagery.

The term βασιλεύς is itself neutral.⁵⁸⁵ Nevertheless, here the particular designations function pejoratively⁵⁸⁶ just as anything 'of/on earth' in the Apocalypse, as explained in the following.

'Kings of the earth' bear a negative connotation, portrayed as the enemies of God (Psalm 2:2, 101:16; Acts 4:26; cf. Rev 17:14). The kings of the earth –οἱ βασιλεῖς τῆς γῆς are frequently mentioned in the Apocalypse (6:15, 17:2; 18:3.9; 19:18; 21:24),

⁵⁸⁴ Louw-Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, s.v. στερνιάω (§88.254), 769.

⁵⁸⁵ Sals, *Die Biographie*, 126.

⁵⁸⁶ Sals, *Die Biographie*, 127-127: In contrast to what she calls the 'real' kings, who are the believers, followers of Christ, himself the King of Kings (1:5, 17:14, 19:16), οἱ βασιλεῖς τῆς γῆς are *like* kings – ὡς βασιλεῖς (17:12), being legitimized in their power (ἐξουσία) by the Beast, with whom they reign for one hour – μίαν ὥραν λαμβάνουσιν μετὰ τοῦ θηρίου.

Before 17:2, they were last mentioned in 16:14-21. One could interpret their presence now in connection with that particular section, as referring to their uniting forces against God at Armageddon.

Interestingly, as per Nicklas' observation, in Rev 21:24, the kings of the new earth play a positive part as they bring their splendor into the New Jerusalem.⁵⁸⁷

Irrespective of the ulterior associations, the kings will participate in the destruction of the Whore as depicted in 17:16.

The kings' fate will include their punishment in 19:8, which is in some aspects, similar to the Whore's (17:16): the wedding guests, who are invited to take part in the Wedding of the Lamb will eat their flesh –φάγητε σάρκας βασιλέων.

The inhabitants of the earth have become inebriated

The other group, οἱ κατοικοῦντες τὴν γῆν are mentioned quite frequently in the Apocalypse (3:10; 6:10; 8:13; 13:8.14; 17:2.8), but usually with the adjective in the genitive and accompanied by the preposition ἐπί. Here is the only instance when they are mentioned both without the preposition and in the accusative (τὴν γῆν).

Their references are again negative as in the case of the kings,⁵⁸⁸ the "infatuated worshippers of the Beast"⁵⁸⁹ (13:8). God sends judgment (3:10, 6:10) upon inhabitants. The Apocalypse also reports on the inhabitants of the earth, who have been partially punished with the seven vials plagues, while the rest will be killed by the sword (19:21).

The phrase 'inhabitants of the Earth' designates on the one hand the inhabited, civilized population on Earth. On the other hand, from the perspective of Gods' creation, the inhabitants could encompass humanity as a whole (cf. Eph 3:17, Col 1:19).

In the Apocalypse, it remains unclear whether they are the same with the τοὺς καθημένους ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς (14:6) to whom the gospel is announced.⁵⁹⁰

Inhabitants of the earth are contrasted to the ones who dwell in heaven οἱ ἐν αὐτοῖς [οὐρανοῖ/ ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ] σκηνοῦντες (12:12, 13:6).

Besides being depicted as inebriated, the inhabitants on the earth are collectively guilty (implied by 6:10). They are lead astray (2:20, 13:14, 20:3) and carry the image of the Beast

⁵⁸⁷ Nicklas, Freiheit oder Prädestination? (no pagination).

⁵⁸⁸ Ruiz, *Ezekiel in the Apocalypse*, 315.

⁵⁸⁹ Harrington, *Revelation*, 173.

⁵⁹⁰ Sals, *Die Biographie*, 125.

(13:14), worshipping it (13:8.12). Their names are not written in the Book of Life (13:8, 17:8).

Considering the above, the group named ‘inhabitants of the earth’ could be identified as those excluded from the New Jerusalem, namely “the cowardly, the faithless, the polluted, the murderers, the fornicators, the sorcerers, the idolaters, and all liars” whose place is “in the lake that burns with fire and sulphur, where there is a second death” (21:8, cf. 19:20-21, 22:15).

There is a larger context in the Apocalypse in which food and drinking have a negative connotation⁵⁹¹ and conjoin with images of sexual promiscuity.

The implications of eating food sacrificed to idols are disastrous for the community in Thyatira. Such actions lead to alienation from God, a loss in salvation and potentially death (2:22-23).⁵⁹² Similarly, the intoxication of the inhabitants by the Whore, as well as the Whore’s consumption of blood (v.6) can have equally defiling consequences and death for the agent, namely the Whore (17:6, cf. 18:24).

Additionally, drunkenness as a spiritual blindness is evoked in Isa 29:9-10. Hos 4:11-12 ascribes harlotry, wine and new wine the power to take away understanding. Although no effect is recorded textually in 17:2b, the allusion is clear: once imbibed, all resistance is abandoned.

In contrast with images of intoxication by blood and wine, ‘water of life’ is offered for free in the New Jerusalem (21:6).

Inebriety is usually a condemned behavior, as it is associated with reckless living (Eph 5:18), lack of moral restraint (Luke 21:34), which should be avoided (cf. Lev 10:9, Deut 21:20; Ezek 23:33, Job 12:25, Sir 18:33, 19:2 and Gal 5:21, 1 Cor 5:11.).⁵⁹³

The wine of her fornication

In 17:2b, the intoxicating source of the inhabitants of the earth is the wine of the whore’s immorality –τῆς πορνείας αὐτῆς.

In the Apocalypse, this phrase appears in connection with whoring, exercised by the Great Whore in both 14:8 and 18:3. However, the reference in 14:8 is slightly modified: ‘wine’ is

⁵⁹¹ Duff, *Wolves in Sheep’s Clothing*, 72; cf. Sals, *Die Biographie*, 107.

⁵⁹² Duff, *Wolves in Sheep’s Clothing*, 74.

⁵⁹³ Louw-Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon*, s.v. *Drunkenness*, § 88.283-88.288, 773.

added one more genitive τοῦ θυμοῦ, reading together as “the wine of the wrath⁵⁹⁴ of her immorality” –ἐκ τοῦ οἴνου τοῦ θυμοῦ τῆς πορνείας αὐτῆς making reference to Babylon.

This image echoes that of the wrath of God in 14:10: the worshippers of the Beast will also drink “from the wine of the wrath of God” –ἐκ τοῦ οἴνου τοῦ θυμοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ (14:10), meaning they forego punishment.

Moreover, the contrast between the ‘wine of the wrath of Whore’ and that ‘of the wrath of God’ is intensified. The Whore’s “wine of the wrath of immorality” (cf. 14:8, 18:3) –οἶνος τοῦ θυμοῦ τῆς πορνείας –is less potent than “the wine of the fierce wrath of God, the Almighty” –οἶνος τοῦ θυμοῦ τῆς ὀργῆς τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ παντοκράτορος (19:15, 16:19).

The conjoining with drinking wine and punishment is also familiar with Psalm 60:5, 75:9 and especially in Isa 51:17, when Jerusalem is said to have drunk at the hand of the Lord, the cup of his wrath.

It was previously mentioned that in the Apocalypse, prostitution is linked with idolatry (the almost parallel description of Jezebel in 2:14.20-21; but also 9:21; 14:8), which may invite a further cultic connection. In this line, one could interpret the ‘wine of her fornication’ in connection with the cult of the emperor, where wine offerings were sometimes required.⁵⁹⁵ Idolatry associated with foreign cults supports the previous interpretation. Esther 1:7; 3:15; Daniel 1:5.8, 5:1.3f, as books having a Persian background paint drunkenness as part of the court routine.⁵⁹⁶

⁵⁹⁴ In BDAG, 365 the alternative translation of θυμός features: θυμός is translated as ‘passion’, so Rev 14:8 is rendered as the ‘wine of passion of her immorality’ –ἐκ τοῦ οἴνου τοῦ θυμοῦ τῆς πορνείας αὐτῆς; cf. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 755, rendering the genitive construction τοῦ θυμοῦ and τῆς πορνείας as genitives of cause, purpose of result.

⁵⁹⁵ Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 849.

⁵⁹⁶ Madeleine S. Miller, J. Lane Miller, s.v. Drunkenness, in: *Harper’s Bible Dictionary*, New York: Harper Row, 1961, 144.

1.4 Provisional Assessment (2)

Verse 2 of chapter 17 adduces new information to the Great Whore, not only by introducing two new groups with whom she interacts, but also by presenting the reasons (or justifications) for her divine indictment.

The active engagement of the Whore with the kings and inhabitants of the earth points further to delineating her realm dominance, namely the earth. Such dominance reinforces the political and economic undertones of her liaisons, confirming once again the etymology of harlot – πόρνη discussed previously.

Extensions of this sort point to the different layers of understanding ‘fornication’: on the one hand fornication entails an explicit illicit liaison, on the other hand, it entails political and economic undertones, and as a result –idolatry.

One can record a continuation of the sexual language, by means of πόρν- cognates. Only one verse accommodates three mentions, either by means of a pronominal adjective –ἥς, or by a verb –πορνεύω and by a noun –πορνεία.

This fact may serve to continue with the masculine perspective initiated from the v.1 onwards.

Political and economic undertones of fornication can act as potential markers of threat, for their association can destabilize the literal understanding of sexual imagery.

The first two verses delineate also other characters involved in the vision, their standpoint and attitudes in the text. They contribute to the clarification of the sides engaged in the eschatological scenario: the martyrs, angels (most probably the narrator) confront the Whore together with the Beast, kings and inhabitants of the earth.

For this reason, their presentation and fate in the Apocalypse is as negative as the associations they evoke.

The wine, as the source for the inhabitants’ intoxication brings to mind possible cultic reverberations of contemporary idolatrous functions. These are meant to contribute further to the negative context created so far, by relating relate very well with the theme of judgment as evidenced from the OT intertexts. Such identification further places the image in the discourse of the social dimension of prostitution, as per the already (in)famous intratext with the Great Whore, respectively, Jezebel in Apocalypse 2:20-22.

A social dimension to understanding fornication is conceived in the following as an attack on the social body. Eating the wrong food or engaging in the wrong kind of sex⁵⁹⁷ is condemned for “in many cultures, prostitution can serve as a metaphor for voracious, almost limitless mode of consumption that merges the sexual and the material.”⁵⁹⁸

Keeping the boundaries intact is a means of maintaining the ‘right’ rules governing over food and sex.

Given the extent and implications of the metaphor of inebriation, these rules can no longer be kept, resulting thus into a type of chaos that needs to be regulated by divine intervention. The sanction of the Whore (and later of her associates) is issued for enticing others, here ‘kings’ and ‘inhabitants of the earth’ to take part in the defiling actions.

We notice how mentioning of fornication, or immorality, just like in the previous verse has the purpose of further delineating the character of the Whore, by insisting on *sexual termini*.

Even if later, the geopolitical dimension by reference to Babylon will be added to the sexual charge i.e. that of πόρνη, sexual promiscuity will always be a component of the image⁵⁹⁹ (cf. 18:3.9, 19:2).

On the whole, the first two verses already give a substantial amount of information on the character of the Great Whore. The information is inferred primarily from the text. Secondarily it is accrued by means of textual relations established either with similar contexts (and gendered images!) found in the Apocalypse, as well as with more distant, but thematically related OT ones.

1.5 Feminist Substance of Interest

The feminist interest focuses in the first two verses on the Great Whore’s gender identity, as well as sexual conduct.

As mentioned in the Theoretical Part, a reader’s oriented approach evidences that our understanding is organized into informational blocks throughout the reading process.

⁵⁹⁷ Paul B. Duff, *Who Rides the Beast?*, 98.

⁵⁹⁸ Thomas A. J. McGinn, *The Economy of Prostitution in the Roman World: A Study of Social History and the Brothel*, Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 2004, 53-54.

⁵⁹⁹ Glancy and Moore, *How Typical a Roman Prostitute*, 555.

These blocks are formed on the one hand, by gradually gathering information provided by the text, on the other hand, information is provided by the intra- and intertextual relations. With intertexts, a continuous recurrence of motifs or key words in the presentation of the Whore is pointing to one direction: that the Whore is evil and as such her judgment is entirely justified.

There are two observations I would like to make regarding these introductory verses.

The non-revised exegetical analyses depicting various applications of the historical-critical method to be found in exegetical commentaries revolve around an early identification of the Whore in v.2 with v.5 (Babylon) and strengthen their argument by appeal to v. 18 (city), maintaining thus the political dimension of the gendered apparition.

As a result, they discuss the image of the Whore sitting on many waters, in view of the intertextual connections with some of the standard Old Testament prophetic writings.

The immediate step they undertake is the identification of the Great Whore in its political manifestation as Rome,⁶⁰⁰ or Jerusalem,⁶⁰¹ or even Babylon.⁶⁰² In other variants, they

⁶⁰⁰ Cf. among others J. E. Bruns, The Contrasted Woman of Apocalypse 12 and 17, in: *Catholic Bible Quarterly* 26/1964, 459-463, Adela Yarbro Collins, Revelation 18: Taunt Song or Dirge in: J. Lambrecht (ed.) *L'apocalypse johannique dans le Nouveau Testament*, Leuven, 1980, 185-204; C.P. Thiede, Babylon der andere Ort: Anmerkungen zu 1Petr 5,13 und Apg 12,17, in: *Biblica* 67/1986, 532-538, Bergmeier, Die Erzähure und das Tier, Robert B. Moberly, When was Revelation conceived? in: *Biblica* 73/1992, 276-392, 383-389; Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy*, Yarbro Collins, Feminine Symbolism in the Book of Revelation a, 20-33, H. Giesen, Das römische Reich im Spiegel der Johannes Apokalypse, In: *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt* II 26.3/1996, 2501-2614, Nelson J. Kraybill, *Imperial Cult and Commerce in John's Apocalypse*, Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996, Aune, *Revelation 17-22*; Beale, *The Book of Revelation*; C.-H. Hunzinger, Babylon als Deckname für Rom und die Datierung des 1. Petrusbriefes, in: H. G. Reventlow (ed.), *Gottes Wort und Gottes Land: Hans Willhelm Hertberurg zum 70. Geburtstag*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1965, 67-77, G. B. Caird, *The Revelation of Saint John the Divine*, New York: Harper & Row, 1966, 212-213, Ian Boxall, *The Revelation of Saint John* (Black's New Testament Commentaries vol. 18), London: Continuum, 2006, 39-42, Wilfrid J. Harrington O.P., *Revelation* (Sacra Pagina Series vol.16) Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 1993, 73, Leonard L. Thompson, *The Book of Revelation. Apocalypse and Empire*, New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990, 13, Christopher A. Frilingos, *Spectacles of Empire. Monsters, Martyrs and the Book of Revelation*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004, 58ff, Yarbro Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis*, 121-124, Royalty, *Streets of Heaven*, 177-209, Schüssler-Fiorenza, *Justice and Judgment*, Jacques Ellul, *Apocalypse. The Book of Revelation* (trans. George Schreiner), New York: The Seabury Press, 1977, 190-201, Prigent, *Commentary on the Apocalypse of St. John*, 486, Garrett, Revelation, 472-473.

⁶⁰¹ Margaret Barker, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000, 279-301, Edmondo F. Lupieri, *A commentary on the Apocalypse of John* (trans. Maria Poggi Johnson and Adam Kamesar), Grand Rapids, Michigan/Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999, 249-281, Josephine Massyngherde Ford, *Revelation. Introduction, Translation and Commentary* (The Anchor Bible), New York: Doubleday & Co., 1975, 285; Alan James Beagley, The 'Sitz im Leben' of the Apocalypse with Particular Reference to the Role of the Church's Enemies, (Beiheft zur Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche

favour either a historical contemporary reading, or a more ahistorical, or even transhistorical feature. The Whore becomes the symbol for the “ultimately seductive expression of secular wrongdoing.”⁶⁰³ An ecclesiological-oriented approach conceives the church existence in the war against the assimilation of the anti-Christian powers, which attempt at destroying the Church from inside and outside.⁶⁰⁴

Such a premature identification leads to a loss of content in the composition of the metaphor. The acts of harlotry will be subsequently read as idolatry and all the subsequent meanings channeled to this area.

The rhetorical power of such a use of imagery is then diminished by forcing it into only one spectrum of interpretation.

Additionally, the order of the semantic construction of the metaphor modifies. Subsequently, the judgment of the Great Whore becomes the judgment of Babylon the Great and ultimately the judgment of Rome, obviating the human-gendered character of both the image as depicted in vv.3-6, as well as the corporeal aspect of her punishment in the flesh described in 17:16.

In this manner, a gender-informed analysis attempts to render inadequate such a metaphorical composition. It offers corrections and prompts the need to treat equally all the textual dimensions and levels of the gendered metaphor, encouraging not to overlook certain aspects, just because possible intertexts were found and reiterated by the traditional approaches.

For this reason, the corresponding intertexts with OT writings should be rendered as secondary in importance.

In addition, the mere fact of the angel invites the Seer to witness the judgment of the Great Whore offers a masculine perception over the description of the vision. A gender-informed perspective is interested in the extent to which the divine punishment of evil as feminine is legitimate, considering its androcentric character.

Wissenschaft und die Kunde der älteren Kirche 50), Berlin/New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1987, 90-91, J. S. Russell, *The Parousia. The New Testament Doctrine of Our Lord's Second Coming*, Michigan: Grand Rapids, 1999, cf. Kenneth Gentry *Before Jerusalem Fell*, Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1989, Don K. Preston, *Who is this Babylon? A Study of Revelation*, Ardmore, OK: JaDon Productions, 2006, 1999.

⁶⁰² Mostly Neo-protestant interpreters tend to interpret 'Babylon' as Babylon. Cf. For example, Andy M. Woods, What is the Identity of Babylon in Revelation 17-18? My Hermeneutical Approach to Apocalyptic Literature, retrieved from <http://www.pre-trib.org/data/pdf/Woods-WhatistheIdentityofBa.pdf> (last accessed 12.10.2012).

⁶⁰³ Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, 427.

⁶⁰⁴ Matthias Rissi, *Die Hure Babylon und die Verführung der Heiligen. Eine Studie zur Apokalypse Johannes* (Beiträge zur Wissenschaft vom Alten und Neuen Testament, Heft 136), Stuttgart/Berlin/ Köln: W. Kohlhammer, 1995, 59-60.

Besides the fact that “women are symbolized in male terms either as the ‘whore’ or as ‘the good woman,’”⁶⁰⁵ I detect among the rhetorical artifices, a derogatory calling of names, also referred as slander, operating as a rhetorical means of belittling the enemy.

Further, slander in this case does not necessarily imply an objective depiction of reality for the discourse is constructed already from a biased perspective.⁶⁰⁶ I have already presented Jennifer Knust’s arguments concerning the fact that such allegations never point solely to sex,⁶⁰⁷ but that in reality, sexual charges are used as tool to assess cultural assertions about sex and morality of the period and thus show the competitive power relations between various groups.

*Once the legitimacy of a position or group has been linked to a particular definition of sexual virtue, accusations of sexual vice become a potent weapon for distinguishing insiders from outsiders, policing groups boundaries, and eliminating rivals. Moreover, sexual slurs [...] can serve as an important resistance strategy: the pretensions of an elite are efficiently skewered by their (supposed) subordinates once the emptiness of their claims to virtue have been exposed.*⁶⁰⁸

Such an observation would orientate towards a contemporary understanding of the dynamics of John’s contemporary groups competing for religious supremacy.

Nevertheless, the ideological consequences of this rhetorical strategy are immediate and correspond with the androcentric perspective of a patriarchal culture. Their final goal represents the positioning of readers as opponents of the Whore. In doing so, they may run the risk of internalizing the masculine gender as normative. A mentally strenuous situation, respectively immasculation may occur throughout the vision.

Expressed otherwise, in a more corporeal dimension, rather than rhetorical, it would be interesting to understand to which extent is the one identified as the Great Whore an actual *whore*.⁶⁰⁹

All we have for the moment is a one-dimensional account, in which an image of a woman is (passively) described. She is introduced as a ‘whore’. This appellative also features in the account of the witness to the scene of judgment, i.e. John, the Seer whom we cannot suspect at this moment of biasness.

⁶⁰⁵ Schüssler- Fiorenza, *Vision of a Just World*, 13.

⁶⁰⁶ Cf. Knust, *Abandoned to Lust*.

⁶⁰⁷ Knust, *Abandoned to Lust*, 1.

⁶⁰⁸ Knust, *Abandoned to Lust*, 3-4.

⁶⁰⁹ Sals, *Die Biographie*, 118.

From a sociological standpoint, I will underline in the following the power and potential of this appellative. Pheterson proffers a list of the prostitute's offences against cultural norms comprising seven items: (1) having sex with strangers; (2) having sex with multiple partners; (3) taking sexual initiative and control and possessing expertise; (4) asking money for sex; (5) being committed to satisfying men's lusts and fantasies; (6) being out alone on the streets at night dressed to incite or attract men's desires; (7) being in the company of supposedly drunk or abusive men whom they can either handle (as 'common' or 'vulgar' women) or not handle (as 'victimized' women).⁶¹⁰

Considering the technical definition above, when transferring it onto the actual perception of the image of the Great Whore in the Apocalypse, the following observations occur.

From the description we receive in the vision of Apocalypse 17, the Whore is identified through her multiple partners. This corresponds to the second attribute of Pheterson's definition.

In view of the victimized nature of the 'inhabitants of the earth', one can also assume that the Whore has control and takes initiative (cf. attribute 3).

In addition, the manner in which she is dressed may entail an erotic capital oriented towards inciting and attracting men, desires (cf. attribute 5).

Tangentially, the economic aspect is also present with the Great Whore (cf. attribute 4), albeit differently: the Whore herself is presented as prosperous. Also drunkenness is also mentioned, as part of her company (cf. attribute 7), yet in a different perspective: not only 'the inhabitants of the earth are made drunk from the wine of her fornication', but also the Whore is presented as 'inebriated with blood'.

The contemporary implications such a discourse may purport will be further discussed when assessing the corporeal dimension of the metaphor in question.

For the moment being, however, the leitmotif of the first two verses implies a negative assessment of female sexuality at a larger scale, by the associations with kings of the earth, as well as inhabitants of the same abode.

In contrast to her, as readers we are not currently witnessing the kings and inhabitants' judgment, but only the whore's. It is uncertain whether this omission is at this point connected with their status as victims, possibly implied by the transience of the state in which they are found.

⁶¹⁰ Gail Pheterson, The Whore Stigma: Female Dishonour and Male Unworthiness, in: *Social Text* 37/1993, 39–54, 46.

However, a premature assumption regarding the victimization of the kings and inhabitants of the earth could be as detrimental as the overstressing the political dimension of the whore image, in as much as it would prove to be textually inadequate.

One cannot but notice, from what was presented above, that textual punishing of kings and inhabitants is relatively short, when compared to the length of the whore's.

Additionally, from a gender-informed perspective, it is relevant to note the textual importance of 17:1 that intentionally contrasts the reference in 21:9, where the Bride of the Lamb is presented.

This contrast maintains the dichotomist model in the presentation of gendered images.

Moreover, Rev 17:2 is repeated in the following chapter (18:3) in an attempt to overemphasize the guilt of the wrongdoers and their just punishment (cf. the textual parallel with Jezebel).

These points will be presented later, once the portrait of the Whore gains more substance.

2. General Overview of the Vision (17:3-6)

17:3a Καὶ ἀπήνεγκέν με εἰς ἔρημον ἐν πνεύματι.

b Καὶ εἶδον γυναῖκα καθήμενην ἐπὶ θηρίον κόκκινον,
γέμον[τα] ὀνόματα βλασφημίας,
ἔχων κεφαλὰς ἑπτὰ καὶ κέρατα δέκα.

4a Καὶ ἡ γυνὴ ἣν περιβεβλημένη πορφυροῦν καὶ κόκκινον
b καὶ κεχρυσωμένη χρυσίῳ καὶ λίθῳ τιμίῳ καὶ μαργαρίταις,
c ἔχουσα ποτήριον χρυσοῦν ἐν τῇ χειρὶ αὐτῆς γέμον βδελυγμάτων
καὶ τὰ ἀκάθαρτα τῆς πορνείας αὐτῆς

5 Καὶ ἐπὶ τὸ μέτωπον αὐτῆς ὄνομα γεγραμμένον, μυστήριον.

Βαβυλῶν ἡ μεγάλη, ἡ μήτηρ τῶν πορνῶν
καὶ τῶν βδελυγμάτων τῆς γῆς.

6a Καὶ εἶδον τὴν γυναῖκα μεθύουσαν ἐκ τοῦ αἵματος τῶν ἁγίων
καὶ ἐκ τοῦ αἵματος τῶν μαρτύρων Ἰησοῦ.

b Καὶ ἐθαύμασα ἰδὼν αὐτὴν θαῦμα μέγα.

(And the angel carried me away in the spirit to a desert. And I saw a woman seated upon a scarlet beast, full of blasphemous names, having seven heads and ten horns.

And the woman has been clothed with purple and scarlet and has been adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls. In her hand, she had a golden cup full with abominations and with the impurities of her prostitution.

And upon her forehead, a name, a mystery has been written Babylon the great, the mother of the whores and of the earth's abominations.

And I saw the woman drunk with the blood of the saints and the blood of the witnesses of Jesus.

And upon seeing this, I was greatly amazed.)

2.1. Preliminary Methodical Considerations and Structural Overview

The choice for this particular subdivision is rooted in the understanding of the internal coherence of the text (vv. 3b-6). More exactly, either the v. 3a belongs semantically to the previous unit regarding the invitation of the angel addressed to the Seer, or it can be interpreted as an introduction to the actual vision unfolding before the John's eyes.

To illustrate the latter option, I consider verses 3a and 6b frame this sub-unit.⁶¹¹ The structure thus formed encompasses the following sequences: the Seer is taken to the place of the vision (17:3a), he sees the Whore and the Beast on which she is seated (17:3b). The description of the Beast (17:3b) and the Whore (17:4-6a) follow, as well as the Seer's reaction (17:6b) is recorded.

Moreover, the location of the vision in rapport with the preceding and the following parts contributes to the coherence of the larger passage.

There are actually two manners of linking the verses of the previous section (vv. 1-2) with the current one: either as following the pattern of 'frame story', i.e. 'a story within a story', or as a single vision with two tableaux.

If the angel appearing to the Seer (17:1-2) is a vision in itself, vv. 3-6 of this subunit form a vision within a vision: within the already declared frame of 17:1-2, whose object was τὸ κρίμα τῆς πόρνῆς τῆς μεγάλης (vision 1), vision 1' (17:3-6) unfolds. As a result, the actual vision, meant to describe *the-judged-one* starts only in v.3 and not in v.1.

Alternatively, I could refer to it as one single vision in two stages, in which the first two verses of chapter 17 are introductory to what follows in vv.3-6.

Some other markers contribute to the coherence between the two subunits. Such markers coherently operate by either directly mentioning the agents involved, or indirectly, both by inner structural referents, as well as external indicators provided by the very grammatical arrangement of the Greek sentences.

In terms of *participants*, nothing is changed: just like previously, the angel takes the lead, transporting the Seer to the actual place where the latter will record the vision.

Even if the subject of the verb ἀπήνεγκεν is not explicitly mentioned in vv.3-6, we could infer it is the same angel –εἷς ἐκ τῶν ἐπὶ ἀγγέλων τῶν ἔχόντων τὰς ἐπὶ φιάλας – introduced in 17:1a, mentioned to again in 17:7 –ὁ ἄγγελος –where the definite article would hearken back to 17:1a.

⁶¹¹ R. H. Charles insists as well on the division of the larger textual sequence into this particular subunit. He argues the order of the words, i.e. the verb precedes the object twice in 17:3, once in 17:6 and 17:4-5 possibly evidences a Semitic source. (R. H. Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Revelation of St. John with Introduction, Notes and Indices also the Greek Text and English Translation* (vol. 2), Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 38 George Street, 1920, 2: 55; Ruiz, *Ezekiel in the Apocalypse*, 295). The following section is not phrased in the same pattern. (Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Revelation of St. John*, 2: 61.)

The Seer is referred to as με (17:3a) in the 1st person singular. Aorist active endings⁶¹² indicate the type of narration –first person descriptive narration.

Moreover, in view of the above, the current vision is related to the same subject stated in 17:1b –ή πόρνη ή μεγάλη –although slightly altered.

If we take v.1a literally, we witness in v.3a a change of focus from the vision of the *judgment* of the Great Whore (vv. 1-2) to her *description* (vv. 3-6).

Chapter 18 will deal at large with her subsequent judgment, carried out only in 19:21.

The correspondence between the summoning of v.1b –δεῦρο, δείξω σοι, the actual transportation in v.3a –ἀπήνεγκέν με εἰς ἔρημον and the verb εἶδον (vv.3b.6a) offers yet again another argument for the logical consistency of this subunit with vv.1-2.

The noun ή πόρνη is not mentioned explicitly in the subunit comprising vv. 3-6 save the aforementioned reference in v. 5. What else than a whore could be ‘the mother of whores and of the abominations on earth’ –ή μήτηρ τῶν πορνῶν καὶ τῶν βδελυγμάτων τῆς γῆς.

‘Mother’ here functions as another cognate of πόρνη.

Instead, γυνή is found in v.4b –ἔχουσα ποτήριον [...] γέμον βδελυγμάτων καὶ τὰ ἀκάθαρτα τῆς πορνείας αὐτῆς. The subject of this subunit is very frequently addressed to as (ή) γυνή (vv.3b.4a.6a.)

Briefly defined in 17:1-2 through her actions (fornication, drinking abuse), the Whore will be further portrayed (17:4a-6a). An array of elements pertaining to her external appearance will be presented: purple and scarlet dress, gold, precious stone, pearls, golden cup in her hands (ἦν περιβεβλημένη πορφυροῦν καὶ κόκκινον καὶ κεχρυσωμένη χρυσίῳ καὶ λίθῳ τιμίῳ καὶ μαργαρίταις, ἔχουσα ποτήριον χρυσοῦν ἐν τῇ χειρὶ αὐτῆς).

Also pertaining to her appearance is her drunken state (v.6).

While v.2b mentioned the Whore possibly inebriating the inhabitants of the earth –οἱ κατοικοῦντες τὴν γῆν, in v.6a, she is presented as such –μεθύουσιν.

However, the source of her drunkenness here is different from that of the inhabitants of the earth. She is drunk on the blood of the saints and of the witnesses to Jesus μεθύουσιν ἐκ τοῦ αἵματος τῶν ἁγίων καὶ ἐκ τοῦ αἵματος τῶν μαρτύρων Ἰησοῦ.

In terms of *setting*, v.3a brings about additional information to the setting in 1a.

⁶¹² I am referring to the verbs ὁράω (specifically, εἶδον in 17:3b.6a) and θαυμάζω (respectively ἐθαύμασα in 17:6b).

While the actual setting of the vision was not mentioned in vv.1-2, the only local reference regards the Whore, i.e. ‘upon many waters’ –τῆς καθημένης ἐπὶ ὑδάτων πολλῶν. This could create an expectation that the vision take place near those waters. However, v.3a locates the vision in the desert –εἰς ἔρημον. Additionally, v.3b deals with different placement of the Whore, who is seated this time ‘upon a scarlet beast’ –καθήμενην ἐπὶ θηρίον κόκκινον.

The latter reference, although new, will make the object of the next subunit (starting with v. 7b onwards), where *angelus interpretes* will clarify ‘the mystery of the woman and of the beast that carries her’ –τὸ μυστήριον τῆς γυναικὸς καὶ τοῦ θηρίου τοῦ βαστάζοντος αὐτήν.

All these considered, the excerpts coincide in motifs as follows: the depiction of the woman as sitting/ seated, the recurrence of πόρν- cognates, as well as the image of inebriation transferred now onto the Whore herself.

Besides the markers of continuity between the two above-mentioned subunits, there are also some ruptures at the structural level.

These aim on the one hand at emphasizing the *uniqueness* of the subsection comprised within the vv. 3-6. On the other hand, they enforce the idea of a *new* subunit, in which other information than what was presented so far in vv. 1-2 will be adduced.

To sum up again the differences, I would like to point out that first of all, the Seer is told by the angel he is about to witness the judgment of the Great Whore (17:1-2). Instead, extensive description of the Whore’s outer appearance follows, which although relevant for our current interpretation, does not seem to confirm our original horizon of expectation.⁶¹³

Then, the actual setting of the Whore seems problematic and somehow does not conform to 17:1b, where she is clearly introduced as “seated upon many waters” (τῆς καθημένης ἐπὶ ὑδάτων πολλῶν). Insetad, she is “seated upon a scarlet beast” (καθήμενην ἐπὶ θηρίον κόκκινον, v. 3b).

Furthermore, the topographical reference “on many waters” (17:1b) regarding the Whore’s placement is again opposed to the setting of the vision, respectively, the “desert” (v.3a). Functionally, this paradox may be aiming at transmitting a particular message, derived from a figurative understanding of “desert” probably alluding to the Whore’s tragic demise (17:16).

Lastly, I have already mentioned that instead of referring to the apparition as “the whore” as it was introduced to the Seer in v.1, John sees “a woman” (also repeated in 17:4a, 6a).

⁶¹³ This is even more contradicted in v.7, where the angel, instead of continuing with the theme of judgment, chooses to present the ‘mystery of the Whore and Beast which carries her’.

In the following, I will compare in a tabular manner the reports of the angel and the Seer, respectively. I will also note the discrepancies between what was promised by the angel and what was actually seen by Seer. By these, I aim to show that such inconsistencies are not singular. These point rather to the existence of two narrative voices, having at times different accounts on the same event, yet similar in terms of the leitmotifs employed.

Table 1

ANGEL in 17:1b-2	SEER in 17:3b-6a
τὸ κρίμα τῆς πόρνῆς τῆς μεγάλης (the judgment of the Great Whore) (17:1b)	γυναῖκα (a woman) (17:3b)
τῆς καθημένης ἐπὶ ὑδάτων πολλῶν (seated upon many waters) (17:1b)	καθημένην ἐπὶ θηρίον κόκκινον, γέμον[τα] ὀνόματα βλασφημίας, ἔχων κεφαλὰς ἑπτὰ καὶ κέρατα δέκα. (seated upon a scarlet beast, full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns) (17:3b)
μεθ' ἧς ἐπόρνευσαν οἱ βασιλεῖς τῆς γῆς (the kings of the earth have fornicated with her) (17:2a)	
ἐμεθύσθησαν οἱ κατοικοῦντες τὴν γῆν ἐκ τοῦ οἴνου τῆς πορνείας αὐτῆς. (The inhabitants of the earth have become inebriated from the wine of her immorality) (17:2b)	γυναῖκα μεθύουσαν ἐκ τοῦ αἵματος τῶν ἁγίων καὶ ἐκ τοῦ αἵματος τῶν μαρτύρων Ἰησοῦ. (woman inebriated from the blood of the saints and from the blood of Jesus' witnesses) (17:6a)
	ἡ γυνὴ ἦν περιβεβλημένη πορφυροῦν καὶ κόκκινον (the woman dressed in purple and scarlet) (17:4a)
	κεχρυσωμένη χρυσίῳ καὶ λίθῳ τιμίῳ καὶ μαργαρίταις (glittered with gold and precious stones and pearls) (17:4b)
	ἔχουσα ποτήριον χρυσοῦν ἐν τῇ χειρὶ αὐτῆς γέμον βδελυγμάτων καὶ τὰ ἀκάθαρτα τῆς πορνείας αὐτῆς (having a golden cup in her hand full with abomination and the impurities of her immorality) (17:4c)
	ἐπὶ τὸ μέτωπον αὐτῆς ὄνομα γεγραμμένον, μυστήριον, Βαβυλῶν ἡ μεγάλη, ἡ μήτηρ τῶν πορνῶν καὶ τῶν βδελυγμάτων τῆς γῆς (upon her forehead a name of blasphemy, mystery, Babylon the Great, the mother of the whores and of the abominations on earth) (17:5)

In the subsection comprising vv. 3-6, the following observations are ensued.

Elements of novelty complementing the portrayal of the Whore are her luxurious attire, the scarlet beast (v.3b) with seven heads and ten horns, the name of the woman – Βαβυλὼν ἡ μεγάλη, ἡ μήτηρ τῶν πορνῶν καὶ τῶν βδελυγμάτων τῆς γῆς (v.5), as well the Whore herself being drunk on the blood of saints and witnesses of Jesus (v.6a).

The scarlet beast is added to the groups of kings. At the same time, in the group of victims, respectively inhabitants of the earth are *martyrs of/to Jesus and saints*. This fact may represent an extension of the guilt ascribed to the Whore in 17:2.

The last verse of the unit (v.6b) –καὶ ἐθαύμασα ἰδὼν αὐτὴν θαῦμα μέγα –has a double function: it records the Seer's reaction by closing the vision, while at the same time, it provides an incentive for the angel's further clarification, functioning in this case as narrative artifice.

Considering the form of the major verbal constructions (ἀποφέρω, ὁράω and θαυμάζω), the entire subunit comprising vv. 3-6 is stylistically, a descriptive narration in the 1st person singular. It indicates that the moment of the actual writing is *ulterior* to the vision.

The phrasing ἐν πνεύματι (v.3a), but also by the aorist verb form εἶδον (17:3b.6a) are used extensively in the Apocalypse with visions. The state of trance is always followed by a description.⁶¹⁴

Personification is the main figure of style especially in v.5, when the Whore is named Βαβυλὼν ἡ μεγάλη, ἡ μήτηρ τῶν πορνῶν καὶ τῶν βδελυγμάτων τῆς γῆς.

In line with apocalyptic genre, mystery –μυστήριον will be analyzed.

The possible misogynistic undertones, symbolism and metaphor stemming from the corporeal reference to the Whore as 'woman' and 'mother' are also considered.

Subsequently, the images of the subunit will be analyzed, with particular interest on the following motifs: 'woman', 'adornment', 'posture', 'prostitution' as associated with women-states, as well as motifs such as 'violence', 'persecution'.

In this endeavour, comparison with other passages of the Apocalypse will be considered together with possible references retrieved from the Old Testament. These will be analyzed

⁶¹⁴ For other occurrences, cf. Rev 5:1.2.11; 6:1.2.5.8.12; 7:2; 8:2.13; 9:1; 10: 1; 13:1.11, 14:1.6.14; 15:1.2, 16:13; 17:3.6; 19:11.17.19; 20:1.4.11.12, 21:1.

only to the extent I consider them to be in conformity with the aim of gendered reading of the Great Whore. They should not result in a much too early identification of the gendered character with its political manifestation, i.e. Rome, as customary with the historical-critical type of approach.

In the attempt of explaining the complexity of the image of the Great Whore I am discussing, multiple traditions have been suggested.

A tradition of whore-cities operates at the level of this text. This tradition is familiar with writings of the prophets, as well as amply documented outside the Bible.

Prophets usually split their virulent attacks against of two categories: Israelite cities such as *Jerusalem* (Ezekiel 16, 23) and *Samaria* (Ezek 23), as well as non-Israelite cities –*Niniveh* in Nahum 3: 1-7, *Tyre* with Isaiah 23:15, where the notion of adultery is absent just like in the case of the Apocalypse.⁶¹⁵

However, John does not merely borrows from the prophets but he develops his own image/ perspective on things.

Additionally references to certain *topoi*, either bearing Graeco-Roman rhetorical undertones, artistic, or purely literary ones will be also considered. These focus rather less on the function of the image of the Great Whore, and lay more emphasis on the image's power to change certain behaviour of audiences.

As shown in the section dealing with the various feminist interests on the current subject, focusing on gender role from a literary perspective can generate totally different readings than the options enumerated above.

The discussion will prove the ethical as well as the social implications of the image of the Great Prostitute, whose characterization will slowly receive contours at least because of three reading strategies. She is described directly and indirectly, by means of comparison and contrast, as well as by associations.

The textual markers are more or less revolving around the same commonplaces that the reader identified so far when reading the Apocalypse.

⁶¹⁵ Vander Stichele, *Just a Whore*, 6.

3. Posture

3.1. Setting

17:3a Καὶ ἀπήνεγκέν με εἰς ἔρημον ἐν πνεύματι.

b Καὶ εἶδον γυναῖκα καθημένην ἐπὶ θηρίον κόκκινον,

γέμον[τα] ὀνόματα βλασφημίας,
ἔχων κεφαλὰς ἑπτὰ καὶ κέρατα δέκα.

(And the angel carried me in the spirit to the desert. And I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast, which was full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns.)

I chose to split verse 3 into two separate semantic units mainly because I interpret 3a to be introductory to 3b and following verses. Additionally, 3b is signalling the change in perspective that the Seer purports, whose effects for the exegetical analysis will be further dealt with.

Many commentators, among whom Aune,⁶¹⁶ Schüssler-Fiorenza,⁶¹⁷ Rossing⁶¹⁸ and Yarbro Collins⁶¹⁹ interpret this verse as well as the following in terms of a literary description, inspired by ancient literary *topos*, respectively ἔκφρασις. With ἔκφρασις, the object presented is described in detail, as if it were present before our eyes. References to such approach will be further explained.

And he carried me away

A new sequence introduced by καί. The coordinating conjunction indicates a shift to something more concrete. However, it does not change the previous vision, but it rather shows another *tableau*. The conjunction is followed by a verb, which implies movement, respectively ἀποφέρω (ἀπήνεγκέν).

⁶¹⁶ Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 923-928.

⁶¹⁷ Schüssler-Fiorenza, *The Power of the Word*, 137f.

⁶¹⁸ Rossing, *The Choice*, 72-82.

⁶¹⁹ Rossing, *The Choice* (ft.44, 77) mentions Yarbro Collins's utilization of this literary *topos*, in a paper entitled 'The Apocalyptic *Ekphrasis*' held at the International and Interdisciplinary Symposium on the 1900th Anniversary of the Book of Revelation, Athens, 1995.

This verb clarifies not only the local target of this movement (εἰς ἔρημον), but also the nature of the Seer's condition (ἐν πνεύματι).

It completes the movement implied by δεῦρο in v.1b. The angel not only invites the apocalypticist to witness the judgment of the Great Whore, but actually carries him away to the actual scene where the vision takes place, as implied by the prefix ἀπο-, which indicates a movement outwards⁶²⁰ or toward the exterior.

The formulation καὶ ἀπήνεγκέν is often employed in the description of visionary-experiences throughout Apocalypse. Because apocalypses entail revealing of divine mysteries, the boundaries between this world and the other are very fluid. With apocalypses, crossing of these boundaries is implied.⁶²¹

The Shepherd of Hermas 1.1.3, 2.1.1⁶²² eloquently provides examples of this sort: καὶ πνεῦμά με ἔλαβεν καὶ ἀπήνεγκέ με δι' ἀνοδίας τινός, δι' ἧς ἄνθρωπος οὐκ ἐδύνατο ὁδεῦσαι· ἦν δὲ ὁ τόπος κρημνώδης καὶ ἀπερρηγῶς ἀπὸ τῶν ὑδάτων –and a Spirit took me, and bore me away through a pathless tract, through which no man could pass: for the place was precipitous, and broken into clefts by reason of the waters; καὶ πάλιν με αἶρει πνεῦμα καὶ ἀποφέρει εἰς τὸν αὐτὸν τόπον, ὅπου καὶ πέρυσι –and again the Spirit carried me away, and took me to the same place where I had been the year before.

Just as in the Apocalypse, couplings of the verb ἀποφέρω and the noun πνεῦμα feature also in *The Shepherd of Hermas*. However, with the latter, the actual process of entering into a prophetic trance is mentioned, here (cf. 21:9) the actual result is depicted: at the moment of the angel's taking the Seer, one could assume the Seer is already 'in the spirit'.

A somehow similar description pertaining to this verb, having angels as subjects, is recorded in Luke 16:22. The verb in question is used passively, referring to angels carrying the poor man's dead body to Abraham's bosom –ἀπενεχθῆναι αὐτὸν ὑπὸ τῶν ἀγγέλων εἰς τὸν κόλπον Ἀβραάμ.

Associated with visionary experience, it can have a similar meaning with the verb ἀρπάζω "to steal, carry off, drag away, take or snatch away". In this manner, it could be comparable with 2 Cor 12:4, respectively when Paul was caught up into Paradise and heard things that

⁶²⁰ Cf. ἀποφέρω in: BDAG (BibleWorks v. 8). Otherwise, the movement toward exterior is captured in the English translation containing the particle 'away'. (Also Louw-Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* §15.202 (BibleWorks v. 8)).

⁶²¹ Cf. the definition of 'apocalypse', as a literary genre.

⁶²² Cf. *The Shepherd of Hermas*, in: *The Apostolic Fathers* in two volumes (Vol 2). With an English translation by Kirsopp Lake (The Loeb Classical Library 24), Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press/ London: Heinemann, 1950, 1-307, 6-7 and 16-17.

are not to be told, which no mortal is permitted to speak –ὅτι ἡρπάγη εἰς τὸν παράδεισον καὶ ἤκουσεν ἄρρητα ῥήματα ἃ οὐκ ἐξὸν ἀνθρώπῳ λαλῆσαι.

In the spirit

Transports ἐν πνεύματι occur in the Apocalypse 1:10, 4:2 17:3, and 21:9 denoting a new state in the manner of the ecstatic transportation.⁶²³

A synonymous construction to γενέσθαι, textually ἐγενόμην ἐν πνεύματι (cf. 1:10 and 4:2) is (γενέσθαι) ἐν ἐκστάσει, a trance-like condition usually depicting a visionary experience of a revelatory type.⁶²⁴ It is used accordingly used with Acts 10:10, 11:5, 22:17, being preceded by either various forms of γίνομαι or by ὁράω.

Although nothing is said about the circumstances and manner in which such transports occur in the Apocalypse, the result of such a mystical experience involves several elements. On the one hand, it can be recorded a change of topography noted by the Seer, who narrates in a subjective manner the heavenly events about to take place.⁶²⁵

On the other hand, an extensive description of the object thus revealed employs a past construction of the verb ὁράω (1:12, 4:1, 17:3, 21:1) as including the *seven golden lampstands* (1:12f), *heavenly throne* (4:2f), *Babylon* (17:3-6), *New Jerusalem* (21:10f).

The description can be sometimes accompanied by an acoustic element featured with the verb ‘to hear’ ἀκούω. It is either announced with ‘great voice’ –φωνή μεγάλη (1:10) compared to a trumpet –ὡς σάλπιγξ (4:2), or accompanied by the verb ‘to speak’ –λαλέω (1:11.12, 4:1, 17:1, 21:9) occasionally implying a conversation between the angel and the Seer (17:1, 21:9). During this conversation, the former usually invites the latter either to ‘come’⁶²⁶ in order to ‘show’ –δείκνυμι (4:1, 17:2, 21:9.10) a particular scene that will be later described.

⁶²³ Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, 428.

⁶²⁴ Rissi, *Die Verführung*, 50.

⁶²⁵ Michael Labahn, ‘Apokalyptische’ Geographie. Einführende Überlegungen zu einer Toponymie der Johannesoffenbarung, in: M. Labahn, O. Lehtipuu (eds.), *Imagery in the Book of Revelation* (Contributions to Biblical Exegesis & Theology, vol. 60), Leuven-Paris-Walpole: Peeters, 2011, 107-145, 115f.

⁶²⁶ The invitation is formulated either using the verb ‘go up’ ἀναβαίνω in 4:1), or just the particle ‘δεῦρο’ often left untranslated as per 17:1, 21:9.

Aune and Ruiz connect the phrasing in terms of intertextual references, we are discussing with a stereotypical formula found with Ezekiel. He describes raptures ἐν πνεύματι (cf. Ezek 3:4, 8:3, 11:24, 37:1, 40:1.2.4, 43:5).⁶²⁷

Other elements worth noting are the repetition of the verb ἀναλαμβάνω –to lift up (Ezek 3:12.14, 8:3, 11:1.24, 43:5) and ἄγω –to lead (Ezek 8:3, 11:24, 40:1),⁶²⁸ the association with a vision (ὄρασις, cf. Ezek 8:3, 11:24), or the indication of a vision/and or audition by ἰδοῦ⁶²⁹ in Ezek 43:5-6.⁶³⁰ With Ezekiel, the object of these visions is contemplating the glory of the Lord – ἡ δόξα κυρίου (cf. Ezek 3:12, 8:4, 43:5).

Further, John's close dependence on Ezekelian language regarding the nature of physical transport is also poignant in his prophetic commission and authority (cf. Rev 1:1), as well as purpose of such transport, i.e. the announcement of a judgment.⁶³¹

Possibly for this reason Aune suggests the translation of ἐν πνεύματι by the following prepositional phrase 'in a prophetic trance'.⁶³²

Given the above-mentioned intertexts, such a resemblance is not at all unintentional. It stresses on the one hand, the divine character of what awaits to be revealed to the Seer and on the other hand, it highlights the unidimensionality of the divine message.

In the same line, Smalley advances an interesting hypothesis suggesting a certain degree of "deliberate ambiguity" contained in the phrasing ἐν πνεύματι "for it combines the 'spirit' of the writer, who is involved in the ecstasy with the 'Spirit' of God, who enables the action and informs its meaning."⁶³³

⁶²⁷ Ruiz, *Ezekiel in The Apocalypse*, 300. Cf. Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 933, Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, 428, Prigent, *Commentary on the Apocalypse of St. John*, 128.

However, Bauckham considers the expression 'in the spirit' to be a convention of apocalyptic literature. (Prigent, *Commentary on the Apocalypse of St. John*, 128 referring to Richard Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy*, 92-117.)

⁶²⁸ Or ἄγω derivatives such as ἐξάγω –to lead out (Ezek 37:1), or εἰσάγω –to lead in (Ezek 43:5).

⁶²⁹ Louw-Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, s.v. ἰδοῦ (91.13), 812 notes the fact that this is a prompter of attention, emphasizing the following statement "Look! Listen, pay attention, come now, then".

⁶³⁰ Ruiz, *Ezekiel in the Apocalypse*, 301; he also mentions references to Elijah's raptures as depicted in 1 Kgs 18:12, 2 Kgs 2:16. Also cf. Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 934.

⁶³¹ Cf. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 850. Ruiz, *Ezekiel in The Apocalypse*, 302.

⁶³² Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 933; Cf. Frederick J. Murphy, *Fallen Is Babylon: The Revelation to John* (New Testament in Context), Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1998, 354.

⁶³³ Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, 428.

To a desert

The location of the vision is the desert (ἡ ἔρημος). This is actually the place where the Seer is about to witness the judgment of the Great Whore (v.1c).

From heaven –ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ (cf. 15:5),⁶³⁴ the Seer is now taken to the desert –εἰς ἔρημον (17:3a).

The noun ἡ ἔρημος is not used with the dative to indicate a static location, but with the accusative to imply “an extension towards a goal”⁶³⁵ thus providing a further reason to opt for a dynamic continuation of the previous unit (vv.1 -2).

This movement implies the Seer’s abandoning the heavenly dimension and returning to the earthly realm.⁶³⁶

Commentators have attributed different interpretations to the actual place of the vision. The elucidating options range from desert as “a solitary region [...] fitting place for visions”⁶³⁷ having only diversity as purpose,⁶³⁸ a geographically and anthropologically abandoned⁶³⁹ location to an eschatological one.⁶⁴⁰

The eschatological valence is obvious in this instance. In accordance to Beale’s observation, locations in the Apocalypse as elsewhere bear a theological relevance.⁶⁴¹

Throughout the Apocalypse, desert –ἔρημος is quite ambiguous in meaning registering both a positive and a negative connotation. Such ambiguity is not only valid solely in the Apocalypse, but occurs throughout the Bible. ‘Desert’ has a positive value as a location

⁶³⁴ There are multiple textual markers pointing to ‘heaven’ as the actual dimension, where the Seer is transported as in 4:2: ‘at once I was in the spirit, and there in heaven stood a throne’ –Εὐθέως ἐγενόμην ἐν πνεύματι, καὶ ἰδοὺ θρόνος ἔκειτο ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ –and therefore witnesses celestial events such as in 8:1: there was silence in heaven for about half an hour –ἐγένετο σιγὴ ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ and 12:1: a great portent appeared in heaven –σημεῖον μέγα ὤφθη ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ.

⁶³⁵ Louw-Nida, *Greek- English Lexicon of the New Testament*, s.v. εἰς (§ 84.16).

⁶³⁶ Daria Pezzoli-Olgati, *Täuschung und Klarheit. Zur Wechselwirkung zwischen Vision und Geschichte in der Johannesoffenbarung* (Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments 175. Heft), Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Rupprecht, 1997, 144.

⁶³⁷ Isbon Thaddeus Beckwith, *The Apocalypse of John. Studies in Introduction with a Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, New York: The Macmillan Company, 1919, 692. He refers to several occurrences of this sort, such as visions of Moses Exod 3:1ff, 2 Esra 9:23ff, *The Shepherd of Hermas* I, 1.3; III 1, 3. Also cf. Exod 3:1-3, 1 Kgs 19:4-9.

⁶³⁸ Cf. Beckwith, *The Apocalypse of John*, 692. He enumerates earth (1:9-10), heaven (4:1), sea (10:8), on a sea-shore (12:18), and a mountaintop (21:9-10) as additional places where John receives visions.

⁶³⁹ Pezzoli-Olgati, *Täuschung und Klarheit*, 144.

⁶⁴⁰ Ruiz, *Ezekiel in The Apocalypse*, 311.

⁶⁴¹ Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 851.

auspicious for divine revelation and comfort (Exod 19, 1 Kgs 19:4-6, Isa 40:3, Mark 1:35.45, 6:31-35), but it is envisioned also as a place for testing or utter devastation. In a negative vein, the desert is the residing place of the enemies of God⁶⁴² (cf. Exodus, Psalm 95:7-11, Isa 1:7, 13:20, 37:25, Jer 51:36, Mark 1:12-13, Matt 4:1, Luke 4:1-2, Heb 3:8.17).⁶⁴³

As mentioned previously, in the Apocalypse itself, ἔρημος has a positive meaning mostly in chapter 12 (12:6.14), in connection with another vision, where a woman –γυνή and great dragon –δράκων μέγας feature.

To end the dragon's pursuit, the woman, who recently bore a child flees to the desert –a place prepared by God –τόπον ἡτοιμασμένον ἀπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ (12:6), a place of refuge. Moreover, the *locus amoenus* offers the woman nourishment for a period of one thousand two hundred sixty days.

In contrast to the textual references of 12:6.14, in 17:3a, the noun ἔρημος is anarthrous. Depending on whether we opt for this grammatical occurrence as unintentional, such a lack of definite article would not have any particularly meaning.

The function of the desert featured in this vision contrasts the one in the heavenly vision (12:6.14). Additionally, in the heavenly vision of chapter 12, desert is a region completely controlled by divine powers. By contrast, in 17:3a, the whore's location in the desert may imply her controlling it, just like her seat upon waters could possibly allude to certain hegemony on the woman's behalf.

Observations pertaining to the negative interpretation of 'desert' in the Apocalypse may stem from its location *on Earth*.

Additionally, in a negative vein, 18:2 describes desert as 'a dwelling place of demons, a haunt of every foul spirit, a haunt of every foul bird, a haunt of every foul and hateful beast' –ἐγένετο κατοικητήριον δαιμονίων καὶ φυλακή παντὸς πνεύματος ἀκαθάρτου καὶ φυλακή παντὸς ὀρνέου ἀκαθάρτου [καὶ φυλακή παντὸς θηρίου ἀκαθάρτου] καὶ μεμισημένου. Such an association bearing demonic reverberations is familiar also with Isa 13:21, Tob 8:3, Matt 2:43 par.⁶⁴⁴

⁶⁴² Cf. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 851; Ruiz, *Ezekiel in the Apocalypse*, 309.

⁶⁴³ Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation* (Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament), Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 2002, 610.

⁶⁴⁴ Osborne, *Revelation*, 610. Especially for the context of bringing offers in the desert, cf. Lev 16:10, 17:7.

Based on this observation, it is my contention that the above-mentioned association of the desert as having some demonic power remains valid for the following part of the same verse.⁶⁴⁵

In the same line, Beale argues the desert provides mainly a “place of spiritual security and detachment from the world’s dangers”⁶⁴⁶, a place where deception exerted by the Whore cannot find support.⁶⁴⁷ It thus purports a pejorative⁶⁴⁸ effect. This observation is pertinent if we take into account the Whore’s type and intensity of influence exercised on the kings as well as the inhabitants of the earth. This influence results in the kings and inhabitants’ loss of control, as depicted and already analyzed in the previous sub-unit.

However, a further interpretation of desert connects it with the verb ἐρημώω used in the passive in 17:16, 18:17.19. Here, the verb is noted as part of the castigatory treatment applied to Whore, along with ‘devouring her flesh’ –τὰς σάρκας αὐτῆς φάγονται (17:16) ‘burning her with fire’⁶⁴⁹ –αὐτὴν κατακαύσουσιν ἐν πυρί (17:16. 18:8) and inflicting other plagues, such as torment and grief –βασανισμὸν καὶ πένθος (18:7) followed by pestilence and grief and famine –θάνατος καὶ πένθος καὶ λιμός (18:8).

This conspicuous association of the desert becoming the fate⁶⁵⁰ of the Whore was prefigured in the angel’s announcement of a judgment. When associating it with the geopolitical dimension, informed by chapter 18, the threat to ‘make desolate’ is not far from continuing the same line of interpretation.

Considering the long item list of 18:12-14, what was once a prosperous market place for the merchants of the earth –οἱ ἔμποροι τῆς γῆς (18:3) and all shipmasters and seafarers, sailors and all whose trade is on the sea –πᾶς κυβερνήτης καὶ πᾶς ὁ ἐπὶ τόπον πλέων καὶ ναύται καὶ ὅσοι τὴν θάλασσαν ἐργάζονται (18:17) is now ‘laid waste’ ἡρημώθη (18:19). All the while, the above mentioned groups lament this economical loss (18:11.15.18.19). Verses 22-23 show the extent to which such desolation is visible.

⁶⁴⁵ V. 3b presents the Whore’s counterpart –a beast, or a monster –as the Whore’s seat. Such image contributes further to the indirect characterization of the woman. The analysis will be discussed in the following.

⁶⁴⁶ Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 852.

⁶⁴⁷ Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 852.

⁶⁴⁸ Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 934.

⁶⁴⁹ Smoke –ὁ καπνὸς implies the actual burning in Rev 18:9.18 seen by the groups with whom the who is associated, since these see the smoke of her burning –τὸν καπνὸν τῆς πυρώσεως αὐτῆς αὐτῆς. Cf. 19:3 where her smoke (ὁ καπνὸς αὐτῆς) rises up forever and ever in a hallelujah chant.

⁶⁵⁰ Sals, *Die Biographie*, 93; Ruiz, *Ezekiel in the Apocalypse*, 312; Rossing, *The Choice*, 71f.

An option like the above fits the literary frame established by Barbara Rossing, who advances the translation of desert as “wasteland”. She argues the LXX uses one word ἔρημος to translate two Hebrew words, which designate both “wilderness” – מִדְבָּר as well as “wasteland” – תְּהוֹמָה (in the sense of destroyed lands and cities).⁶⁵¹ Rossing argues in favour of the second usage of the noun ἔρημος in 17:3, a choice that meshes well with the image construed in Apocalypse 18 and is quite familiar with OT.

Making desolate – ἡρημώθη – as God’s punishment is very common with Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Hosea. Mostly with the prophets, *cities* will be laid waste: Babylon (Isa 13:9.20.21, Jer 51:26.29.37.43, cf. Rev 17:5), Judah and Jerusalem (Isa 1:7, Jer 4:7.26.27.29), or Tyre (Isa 23:13, Ezek 26:19).

Similarly, when considering the desert in the Exodus experience, its function could be compared with Rev 12:⁶⁵² ‘and I will bring you into the wilderness of the peoples, and there I will enter into judgment with you face to face’ – καὶ ἄξω ὑμᾶς εἰς τὴν ἔρημον τῶν λαῶν καὶ διακριθήσομαι πρὸς ὑμᾶς ἐκεῖ πρόσωπον κατὰ πρόσωπον.

Additionally, without repeating what was written in Part I, I would like to draw attention to some gender-informed perspectives, among them the ones represented by Tina Pippin, Marla Selvidge and Susan Garrett, who opt for a different interpretation of the verb ἡρημώω.

As a result, the verb would purportedly denote a ghoulish description of the Whore’s death by ‘rape’.⁶⁵³ Combining sexuality and violence, the Whore’s ‘devastation’ becomes a sex crime.

All these considered I would like to note the fact that I cannot accept the image of the Whore’s devastation in terms of a sex crime. Nevertheless, 17:16 is mentioned in the current analysis only tangentially.

Then, the corporeal interpretation contradicts on the one hand, the global perspective I hold on the image of the Great Whore as both corporeal and metaphorical. On the other hand, envisioning the Whore’s death in terms of a ‘sex-crime’ is tantamount to overfocusing on the Whore’s corporeal dimension, which does not represent the actual orientation of this academic enterprise.

⁶⁵¹ Rossing, *The Choice*, 72.

⁶⁵² Ruiz, *Ezekiel in the Apocalypse*, 310.

⁶⁵³ Marla Selvidge, *Reflections on Violence and Pornography*, 280; cf. Pippin, *Death and Desire*, 58, also Kim, *Uncovering Her Wickedness*, 73; Garrett, *Revelation*, 473.

Further associations and contrasts

In view of the intratextual information provided both by the previous subunit and the subunit introducing the New Jerusalem, 'desert' can be thus theologically paired and/or contrasted with other elements, such as 'water' and 'mountain' in order to unveil further relevant associations for eschatological site.

The sites mentioned above feature also in the vision of the Great Whore, having the judged one seated upon many waters (17:1c). Moreover, in the verbatim repetition and introduction to the vision of the New Jerusalem –the Great Whore's counterpart –as coming down from heaven, the Seer is transported to a high mountain (21:10).

Before dealing in more detail with the above mentioned contrast, I would like to underline the fact that just like 'desert', 'mountains' and 'waters' retain the double aspect, or ambivalence also recorded with ἔρημος: either as a revelatory site, or as a menacing territory for humans.⁶⁵⁴

Ἡ ἔρημος can be analyzed in direct opposition with the 'many waters' upon which the Whore is seated –καθήμενη ἐπὶ ὑδάτων πολλῶν (17:1b). Unless we understand τὰ ὕδατα in accordance with the angel's interpretation as 'peoples and multitudes and nations and languages' –λαοὶ καὶ ὄχλοι εἰσὶν καὶ ἔθνη καὶ γλῶσσαι (17:15), the setting described in 17:1-3 constitutes apparently an oxymoron.

In my opinion, 'desert' requires a different interpretation, other than the actual "wasteland". Attempts to account for a different interpretation have been sought in secondary, intertextual relations.

Therefore, the association between 'desert' and 'water' in a vision features also with Isaiah. Isa 21:1 reports 'an oracle of the wilderness of the sea'. However, what remains of this phrase is rendered by the LXX as 'the vision of the desert' –τὸ ὄραμα τῆς ἐρήμου.⁶⁵⁵

Water ensures control and thus contributes to exerting influence by the Whore.⁶⁵⁶ In a similar vein, her actual positioning in the desert brings about the same effect, namely, that of power.

⁶⁵⁴ O. Böcher, i.a. ἔρημος, in: Colin Brown (ed.), *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* (vol. 3), Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986, 1004-1015, 1005 as quoted in Ruiz, *Ezekiel in the Apocalypse*, 309.

⁶⁵⁵ Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Revelation of St. John*, 2: 62; Cf. Ruiz, *Ezekiel in the Apocalypse*, 309; Beckwith, *Apocalypse of John*, 693.

⁶⁵⁶ Sals, *Die Biographie*, 93.

In Sals' view, not only does the Whore 'have dominion' over water but also over 'dry' land.⁶⁵⁷

Although most commentators usually exploit the opposition between 'desert' and 'water' there are some observations, concerning their resemblance in terms of symbolic value.

As a result, besides the fact that water and desert are primordial, neutral elements of creation, they indeed bring about a certain notion of infinity, or loss of boundaries,⁶⁵⁸ which further adduce two additional observations.

On the one hand, they carry the element of chaos,⁶⁵⁹ often connected with God's hostile powers.⁶⁶⁰

On the other hand, the loss of boundaries can possibly be interpreted in view of the Whore's immoral character. She is thus secondarily (topographically!) described not only by intense and multiple relationships issued from the dominance over water, but also by the conceitedness implied by the 'desert' as well as meaninglessness of her immoral associations and efforts.

Not only is 'desert' opposed to 'water', but it is also contrasted⁶⁶¹ with 'mountain' –ὄρος. I refer specifically to the vision of New Jerusalem –'Ιερουσαλήμ καινή.

One cannot help noting apart from the identical construction of the formal entrance in both verses –καὶ ἀπήνεγκέν με ἐν πνεύματι (21:10, cf. 17:3), the fact that 'Ιερουσαλήμ καινή is situated on a great and high mountain (21:10) –ἐπὶ ὄρος μέγα καὶ ὑψηλόν, as opposed to Βαβυλὼν ἡ μεγάλη, whose dwelling is recorded ἐν τῇ ἐρήμῳ.

Alternatively, the locations are defining for the characters of the two feminine depictions: the Whore stands low, while the Bride ranks high. Such a contrast is obtained by comparing their ethical function at the textual level.

While maintaining the political aspect of the current vision, as well as the relation of dominance as implied by the Whore's posture, one could delineate closer the inhabitants of these cities as directly resulting from the association between *places* in the Apocalypse and people or *communities*. Rissi⁶⁶² asserts that communities are characterized through their belonging to *earth* (13:12), *heaven* (13:6), to *Jerusalem*, its *temple and Altar* (11:1ff),

⁶⁵⁷ Sals, *Die Biographie*, 96 (ft. 31). Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 851; Ruiz, *Ezekiel in the Apocalypse*, 309.

⁶⁵⁸ Sals, *Die Biographie*, 93.

⁶⁵⁹ Ruiz, *Ezekiel in the Apocalypse*, 310.

⁶⁶⁰ Sals, *Die Biographie*, 93.

⁶⁶¹ Rissi, *Die Verführung*, 50.

⁶⁶² Rissi, *Die Verführung*, 55.

to the *desert* (12:6.13ff), to the *mount of Sion* (14:1), to *Armageddon* (16:16), to the camp of the saints and *the beloved city* (20:9), to the *New Jerusalem* (21) and *Paradise* (22:1-5). In this way, 'desert' is not a concrete place, but rather an illustrative word to designate all the people's communities on earth who present themselves as children of the "mother of whores and the all abominations".

An additional observation is that throughout the Apocalypse, 'mountain' is currently used as figure for strength in 6:14, 8:8, 14:1, 16:20, and 21:10. Power can be both divine and non-divine. Considering the latter type, it can be also manifested in waging war against God (cf. 17:9.14).

The valence ascribed to 'mountain' as implying power concords with some OT reference as in Jer 51:25f, Dan 2:35.44.⁶⁶³

Additionally, 'mountain' also denotes 'kingdom' in Jewish literature (cf. Isa 2:2, Jer 51:25, Ezek 35:3, Dan 2:35,⁶⁶⁴ 1 Enoch 24:8), where the Lord will be portrayed at the *eschaton* as having a mountain as throne.

From the above, one could deduct that at least semantically, the potential of 'desert' is very high.

Since it is geographically characterized by flatness, the term encapsulates the utter powerlessness, as opposed to the 'mountain'.

This opposition may point to the Whore's lack of strength, even if she was presented as possibly dominating over the water, the groups of kings and inhabitants and possibly over the desert. All the fame attributed to the Great Whore is nothing but a vain attempt to impress the Seer, the kings and the inhabitants of the earth.

In conformity with the OT context, the mountain –*ὄρος* is always referring to God, either as the chief-dwelling place, to which some prophecies are related or as the place where God revealed his face.⁶⁶⁵ Similarly, the revelatory character is also evident in the current vision, in which a heavenly envoy reveals an event of divine origin.

⁶⁶³ Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, 435; Cf. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 868, Sals, *Die Biographie*, 95.

⁶⁶⁴ Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, 435; Osborne, *Revelation*, 617.

⁶⁶⁵ Cf. Exod 3:1, 15:17, 19:3. 11. 18. 20, 24:13. 16, Deut 5:23, Psalm 2:6, 23:3, 43:3, 68:16, 74:2, 78:54.68, 99:9, Ode 1:17, Mic 4:1.2, Oba 1:21, Zep 3:11, Zec 8:3, Isa 2:23, 11:9, 27:13, 30:29, 56:7, 65:9. However, some translate *ὄρος* as "hill" (Num 13:17, Deut 1:7.24.41.43, 2:3, 3:25, Jos 11:16, 14:12, 17:15, 18:12, 24:4, Judg 1:11, Hag 1:18, Jer 3:6, 31:23), although there exists a another word for "hill" –*βουνός* Isa 10:32, 31:4, 40:4). It can also refer to Jesus' similar experiences, where revelation of divine origin was important. Jesus prays on the mountain (Matt 4:8, 14:23, Mark 6:46, Luke 6:12, 9:28, 21:37), being also the place where he transfigures (Mark 9:22).

All these references are extremely relevant for the complex implications of the actual site where the judgment of the Great Whore will be pronounced. They stress the fact that the choice of 'desert' is not at all aleatory for the subsequent unfolding of events.

Summary

A 'classical' type of exegesis, i.e. word-by-word analysis was employed, with emphasis on the gender-related elements.

The first part of v.3 encapsulates the dynamic element of the vision: the Seer is taken to a 'desert'.

Standard formulations of apocalyptic visions are utilized in order to create the framework for subsequent disclosure of divine revelation.

This also marks the beginning of a perspectival view, as well implies that the narrator's responsibility for what is revealed is significantly diminished.

As a result, one could reinforce once more the divine character of the vision, as well as the proclamation in the previous subunit, by providing textual information on the Seer's ecstatic experience.

From a feminist perspective, this means that the Seer's perspective is the only reality we can have access to –a reality shaped by androcentric optics. By stressing the manner in which the heavenly emissary operates, the masculine perspective contributes further to the veridicity and the notability of the vision.

The setting changes from *above* to *down*, the vision being localized in an earthly environment, i.e. desert.

Although ambivalent in usages throughout the Apocalypse, 'desert' carries here negative associations. Further, the desert is contrasted to the *locus amoenus* of Apocalypse 12, as well as to the topographical elements such as 'water' and 'mountain'. Its function was also evaluated comparatively within the general framework of vv. 1-2, as well as with the fate of the woman in 17:16, supported by textual data provided by the next chapter (18:17.19). With 17:16 (cf. Rev 18), the generic aspect of the prostitute gives way to the political dimension of the city-state, involving her devastation, implied by various forms of the verb ἐρημόω.

In particular, the location of the vision bears most importantly a theological significance aiming at creating a contrast with the initial topographical reference. Initially, the Whore was seated upon many waters. The reader expects to be (at least) textually 'transported' to a place with many waters. Instead, the vision is located in a deserted area.

Interpretation aiming at revealing a gender-informed substance would mostly take into consideration the 'double entendre' of the verbalized form of 'desert', used predominantly with the description of the woman's devastation, mentioned in 17:16.

Associations stemming from secondary intertexts further contribute to the delineation of the Whore's portrait. The intertextual references amply certified that the images John creates have multiple sources woven in an interesting way. Of these, chaotic associations and loss of control mesh very well with the gendered character I am interested in.

By evaluating secondary associations prompted by intertexts, the readers amass gradually pieces of information regarding the moral character of the judged-one.

Starting with verse 3b, the prostitute introduced at the beginning of this chapter will be described. As following, certain elements, such as her mount (v.3b), her clothes and accessories (v.4), mentioning of what may be interpreted as her name (v.5), her drunken state (v.6a), as well the reaction of the Seer is recorded (6b) will be mentioned.

3.2 Description of the Whore and the Beast. Introduction

17:3b καὶ εἶδον γυναῖκα

καθημένην ἐπὶ θηρίον κόκκινον,
γέμον ὀνόματα βλασφημίας,
ἔχων κεφαλὰς ἑπτὰ καὶ κέρατα δέκα.

(And I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast, which was full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns)

I mentioned previously that the object of John's vision is the Great Whore. In the following features the first explicit gendered reference of the image complex of the Great Whore, as the Seer describes what he sees.

Therefore, the description debuts the second major pillar of the current study, namely the human aspect of the Great Whore. The Seer records a woman (in Greek γυνή). Details of her posture as well as the introduction and short characterization of a θηρίον –beast complete the initial portrayal in this verse.

Of the triad I have mentioned earlier in the analysis, respectively 'whore'-'woman'-'city', only the second element –'woman' will be later interpreted by the angel in 17:18.

Precisely because of his identification of the woman in 17:3b with a city in 17:18, commentators applying a historical-critical method tend to neglect this feminine-gendered aspect. For fear of essentialism, they interpret the current designation, that of 'woman' in the light of the last verse of the chapter.

In doing so, they adduce numerous examples mostly from the OT prophets (but also other sources) to support John's use of such image. For them, the noun is 'just a metaphor': "leaving aside the ambiguity of the image, since the Whore is not just a woman but also a city", exegetes gloss over the fact that within gendered metaphors are inscribed "androcentric views on women, sexuality and power in gender relations".⁶⁶⁶

The gendered aspect of the image will be enlarged upon, since it is not a singular occurrence, but extends to the following two verses, namely 17:4-5.

⁶⁶⁶ Vander Stichele, Re-memembering the Whore, 113-117.

Structurally, the entire subunit (vv.3b-6) is introduced by the aorist form of the verb of perception ὁράω, i.e. in the first person singular. The verb is followed by three present particles in the third person singular. Among these, a passive participial construction, i.e. καθημένη pertains to the description of the woman, whereas the other active participial constructions, namely γέμον and ἔχον belong to that of the beast.

Methodologically, I chose not to split the verse further, because I consider the Beast relevant in the characterization of the woman, however, of secondary importance. As a result, the features of the Beast, as well as their subsequent explanation will not be given the same amount of textual attention in interpretation, in comparison with the feminine aspect of the vision.

And I saw

As I mentioned earlier, the particular phrasing καὶ εἶδον initiates in the Apocalypse descriptions of visions, confirming the trance state in which the Seer finds himself.⁶⁶⁷ The visionary formula is familiar with 5:1.6, 6:1.8, 8:12, 7:2, 8:2.13, and 9:1, having important compositional value⁶⁶⁸ for the book.

This particular case is in this way no exception. Moreover, it points to the fact that these visions were “given” to the Seer, being therefore of *divine origin*. Mathewson remarks “John never claims to be seeing a vision, but only records what he saw”.⁶⁶⁹

Nevertheless, the Seer’s recording the vision coordinates with the idea of the *immediacy* as well as the *directness* of the vision achieved by the use of εἶδον.

It is interesting to note that the formulation καὶ εἶδον is a key concept in discussing the crossing of boundaries of time and space in the Apocalypse. The vision of the heavenly

⁶⁶⁷ R. H. Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Revelation of St. John with Introduction, Notes and Indices also the Greek Text and English Translation (vol. 1)*, Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 38 George Street, 1920, 1: 110.

⁶⁶⁸ Jörg Frey, *Das Corpus Johanneum und die Apokalypse des Johannes. Die Johanneslegende, die Probleme der johanneischen Verfasserschaft und die Frage der Pseudonymität der Apokalypse*, in: Stefan Alkier, Thomas Hieke u. Tobias Nicklas (eds.), *Poetik und Intertextualität der Johannesapokalypse* (Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament, 1. Reihe 346), Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2015, 71-134, 126.

⁶⁶⁹ David L. Mathewson, *Verbal Aspects in the Book of Revelation. The Function of Greek Tenses in John’s Apocalypse*, (Linguistic Biblical Studies 4), Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2010, 151, ft. 138.

The use of this particular verb of perception in aorist form of ὁράω (εἶδον) indicates that the Seer records the vision at a later moment of the actual vision (Mathewson, *Verbal Aspects*, 151). The repetition of the same verb in the explanation offered by the angel implies that εἶδες (17:8.12.15.16.18) situates the author no longer in the position to see the vision. cf. Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 939; Smalley, *Revelation*, 434.

Jerusalem belongs to the Seer's past life (21:10). Nevertheless, the Seer's prophetic words are *actualized* for readers/ hearers currently dealing with the text of the Apocalypse.⁶⁷⁰

It also manages to provide –through the interrupted “I saw” of the Seer –space for God, the absolute presence of the Other to various degrees, already in the situatedness of readers and hearers of the Apocalypse.⁶⁷¹

The verb in question may be describing two conditions in the vision: on one level, εἶδον operates as a verb of perception, hence its direct character, pointing at what the Seer actually sees.

At another level, it carries a deeper, more intellectual meaning, in accordance with the formulation in 17:9: ὧδε ὁ νοῦς ὁ ἔχων σοφίαν –this calls for a mind that has wisdom. In this case, divine intervention is impetuous. So ‘seeing’ is only a pretext for the actual decoding of the vision.

In our subunit of interest (vv. 3-6), the verb appears twice.

Although semantically identical, the two occurrences differ in function. The first εἶδον (17:3b) introduces and refers to the outer description of the woman. The second (17:6a) usage illuminates on the Whore's state of mind, i.e. drunkenness,⁶⁷² which touches upon the two-fold reason for her punishment: inebriating the inhabitants of the Earth (17:2b), as well as becoming herself drunk from the blood of the saints and martyrs (17:6a, cf. 18:24). As a result, in both cases the verb denotes the target of God's punishment (the Whore) and the reason for punishment.

Having clarified the circumstances of the vision as well as its divine nature, John changes the focus in this verse, from τὸ κρίμα τῆς πόρνῆς τῆς μεγάλης (17:1a) to a description of a γυνή (17:3b). In doing so, he preserves the same descriptive framework provided by the verbs δείκνυμι (17:1a) and ὁράω (17:3b. 6a).

⁶⁷⁰ Stefan Alkier/Tobias Nicklas, Wenn sich die Welten berühren. Beobachtungen zu zeitlichen und räumlichen Strukturen in der Apocalypse des Johannes, in: Stefan Alkier, Thomas Hieke u. Tobias Nicklas (eds.), *Poetik und Intertextualität der Johannesapokalypse* (Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament, 1. Reihe 346), Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2015, 205-226, 217.

⁶⁷¹ Nicklas, Wenn sich die Welten berühren, 217.

⁶⁷² Mathewson, *Verbal Aspects*, 151, cf. David Aune, *Revelation 1-5* (Word Biblical Commentary 52A), Waco: Waco Books, 1997, 338.

A woman

In what follows, John's description of the Whore (vv.3b-6a) parallels the angel's only to a certain extent.

John uses γυνή instead of πόρνη even several times (17:3a.4a.6a.7.9.18), whereas the angel uses the appellation 'woman' three times in the explanation of the vision, namely in vv. 7.9.18, and 'whore' twice in vv. 15.16. It can be argued that John's denomination is susceptible of a misogynistic tone.

The angel in the beginning of the vision does not use initially the designation 'woman', but refers to the apparition by the appellative 'whore' that contains a moral value. It is John, who 'personifies' the 'Whore' by defining her in biological terms. In doing so, he gives her a 'face', a *woman's* face.

Semantically, the referents of v.1b, i.e. 'whore' and 3b, i.e. 'woman' form a single unit. In this respect, the designation of 3b completes the one in v.1b, implying that the Seer indeed saw the woman, introduced as 'whore' in v.1b.

Additionally, in view of the connectedness of vv. 3-6 with the previous subunit presented earlier in the current study, I would insist on a continuation between the images. I consider that the referent of the previous subunit (vv.1-2), respectively, the Great Whore coincides with that of this subunit, namely, a woman.⁶⁷³

Aune interprets the anarthrous character of γυνή of v.3b as most probably implying that the woman is unknown to the reader, to the extent that all the subsequent mentioning of the character are articular (ἡ γυνή), referring anaphorically to v.3b (17:4.6.7.9.18).⁶⁷⁴

Gender-informed interest with gendered images in the Apocalypse renders John's designation as 'woman' particularly problematic for a contemporary understanding of the text outside the Bible, given the implications regarding depictions of women in general.

These depictions include an extensive use of derogatory terms (whore-cognates) attributed to a gender-informed character –a woman, also negative interpretation of women's aesthetic arrayal, as well as the description of the Whore's violent demise in the Apocalypse. Not only that God commissions all these, but actions of this sort are accompanied by moral evaluations as 'just' and 'true'.

As a result, the sexuality of the Whore is encapsulated in a feminine body, so her function in the text is strongly delineated by her gender.

⁶⁷³ Also cf. Smalley, *Revelation to John*, 428.

⁶⁷⁴ Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 908. I would apply this observation with great caution. Although interesting, the importance and function of the definite or indefinite article differs from Greek to modern English, or even German.

Her distinctive anchoring on the corporeality, bearing sexual immoral connotations is often coupled with v. 16 of the same chapter to describe the utter violence condoned by God against a woman.

However, exegetical interpretations explain away these difficulties by making reference to patterned uses of the concept 'woman' as per various ancient, anthropological, rhetorical and literary sources.

It is thus no wonder that such a blunt analyses have caused quite a turbulence, especially among some feminist exegetes' generic readings, as it was previously presented.

Excursus on the apocalyptic use of 'woman' and its associations

The noun γυνή appears 209 times in the NT. Of these occurrences, the Apocalypse notes only nineteen.⁶⁷⁵

Throughout the book, 'woman' is either used in its *primary sense*, denotative sense such as in 9:8 where locusts are described to have the hair like women's hair –ὡς τρίχας γυναικῶν and 14:4, where the 144,000 are virgins who have not defiled themselves with women – μετὰ γυναικῶν οὐκ ἐμολύνθησαν.

Often γυνή points to a *secondary sense*. In this respect, the noun implies much more than a biological reference. To exemplify, chapter 12 mentions of a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet and a crown of twelve stars on her head –γυνή περιβεβλημένη τὸν ἥλιον, καὶ ἡ σελήνη ὑποκάτω τῶν ποδῶν αὐτῆς καὶ ἐπὶ τῆς κεφαλῆς αὐτῆς στέφανος ἀστέρων δώδεκα (cf. 12:1.4.6.13.14.15.16.17). This aspect also features with the Great Whore called Babylon the Great –Βαβυλὼν ἡ μεγάλη (cf. 17:3.4.6.7.9.18), as well the wife of the Lamb –ἡ γυνὴ τοῦ ἀρνίου (cf. 19:7, 21:9).

Except the positive associations of γυνή in 12 and 19-21, all the other references carry a negative connotation. On two occasions namely with ἡ γυνὴ τοῦ ἀρνίου (19:7, 21:9) the same lexeme carries a double meaning in Greek.⁶⁷⁶ In this particular case, it is translated as the 'wife' of Lamb, maybe to 'sweeten' the bad reputation the noun γυνή got by its

⁶⁷⁵ Isabelle Donegani, „A Cause de la Parole de Dieu et du Temoignage de Jesus“–Le Témoignage Selon l'Apocalypse de Jean: Son Enracinement Extra-Biblique et Biblique: Sa Force comme Parole de Sens, (Etudes bibliques 36), Paris: J. Gabalda, 1997, ft 199; Pezzoli-Olgiatei, Zwischen Gericht und Heil, 75, ft. 10. The references I am discussing are the following: 2:20, 9:8, 12:1.4.6.13.14.15.16.17, 14:4, 17:3.4.6.7.9.18, 19:7, 21:9.

⁶⁷⁶ Zimmermann, *Geschlechtermetaphorik und Gottesverhältnis*, 420.

association with the Great Whore. Such a translation may be veiling an androcentric bias with reference to what is socially accepted behaviour for feminine gender.⁶⁷⁷

For this reason maybe the author adds another designation to the wife of the Lamb, that of νύμφη –bride in 21:2.9, although some manuscripts go to the extent of replacing γυνή with νύμφη also in 19:7.⁶⁷⁸

Huber, who considers the word γυνή “describes a woman in general and a wife in particular” also confirms Zimmermann’s observation above. She motivates her standpoint by the fact that “this reflects the ancient assumption that all women were wives”,⁶⁷⁹ while Zimmermann accounts for this double meaning as textually supported by their (i.e. the Whore and the Bride’s) similar description in terms of clothes and adornment.⁶⁸⁰

Most of the times the main mode of presentation of gendered images is via *contrast*: the virgins are contrasted with ones who have been defiled with women (14:4), the virgin wife of Lamb with the Great Whore, the locusts have different animal characteristics (9:7), but their hair was like women’s hair τρίχας ὡς τρίχας γυναικῶν (9:8).

More interestingly, there are different associations of γυνή in the Apocalypse, which could be used in order to broaden the spectrum of this analysis. Besides ‘bride’ –νύμφη in 18:23, 21:2.9, 22:17, one could also mention ‘mother’ –μήτηρ in 17:5, ‘virgin’ –παρθένος in 14:4, ‘whore’ –πόρνη in 17:1.5.15.16, 19:2 and ‘prophetess’ –προφῆτις in 2:20.⁶⁸¹

It is conspicuous from the above enumeration that the associations can be *biological* thus informed by a strong sexual component, or lack of it (virgin, mother, whore, bride) and/or *professional* (whore, prophetess).

Sexuality plays for the most part an important rhetorical role in assessing women images, establishing also an ethical evaluation: the virgins, whose sexuality remains under men’s control are deemed appropriate, for they are pure and obedient, whereas whores, who are confronting men’s control, are evaluated as evil.⁶⁸²

⁶⁷⁷ Cf. Huber, *Like a Bride Adorned*.

⁶⁷⁸ Cf. Huber, *Like a Bride Adorned*, 150, 171 (ft. 110). She mentions of two manuscripts, 2053 and 2062 that include only γυνή for which Beale suggests a copying error (Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 1065). On the other hand, Aune suggests this is influenced by the assimilation in the larger context of wedding imagery as purported by Rev 21:2.9, 22:17 (Aune, *Revelation*, 1017).

⁶⁷⁹ Huber, *Like a Bride Adorned*, 171.

⁶⁸⁰ Zimmermann, *Geschlechtermetaphorik und Gottesverhältnis*, 417.

⁶⁸¹ Pezzoli-Oligati, *Zwischen Gericht und Heil*, 75.

⁶⁸² Sutter Rehmann, *Die Offenbarung Johannes*, 735 referring to Garrett, *Revelation*, 469.

This observation can possibly account for the reason why for the most part, feminine depictions in the Apocalypse are either sexualized, or devoid of sexuality.

Schüssler-Fiorenza partially accepts the comment above, namely that at the very most, feminine depictions are dichotomized. The contemporary reader perceives them “in terms of good and evil, pure or impure, heavenly or destructive, helpless or powerful, bride or temptress, wife or whore.”⁶⁸³

The dichotomic model in which gendered images are evaluated is also valid with other interpretations. Marla Selvidge notes the following paradox regarding the women’s assessment in the Apocalypse, based on the criterion of sexuality, wherein “images of the opposing women are interactive, dynamic and creative” also powerful and persuasive, whereas “women who do not oppose him [John] are passive, unintelligent, almost boring.”⁶⁸⁴

One of the common traits I notice with these occurrences is that they are defined in a relational manner to ‘man’, evident in the choice of terms presented above.

In the same line, Adela Yarbro Collins writes, “the major symbols are mother, prostitute, and bride. These are all relational terms with the male at the center. The normative person is male. The hero is male. Women are defined in terms of their sexual and reproductive roles.”⁶⁸⁵

Another perspective construes the Apocalypse’s generic universe in ambivalent terms, centered not on male characters, but by linking sexuality with power. In such a discourse, women are either demonized or sanctified.⁶⁸⁶

Postmodern interpretations of the Apocalypse revolve around a pregnant objectification of women, precisely because they operate with a concept of ‘woman’ that is assessed biologically, culturally, rhetorically and theologically. For postmodern analyses, in the scenes featuring gendered characters, there are no longer women-images, but women.

To exemplify, Pippin notes that women in the Apocalypse are all stereotyped, archetypal. They are construed accordingly as men’s objects of desire and violence, unable to take control over their own lives.⁶⁸⁷

⁶⁸³ Schüssler-Fiorenza, *Book of Revelation*, 199.

⁶⁸⁴ Marla Selvidge, *Women, Violence and the Bible*, 125; eadem, Powerful and Powerless Women in the Apocalypse, in: *Neotestamentica* 26/1992, 157-167, 166-167; cf. David L. Barr, Women in Myth and History. Deconstructing John’s Characterizations, in: Amy Jill Levine, Maya Robbins (eds.), *A Feminist Companion to the Apocalypse of John*, 55-69, 58.

⁶⁸⁵ Yarbro Collins, Feminine Symbolism in the Book of Revelation a, 33; cf. Pippin, Eros and the End, 200.

⁶⁸⁶ Marla Selvidge, Powerful and Powerless Women, 157-167.

In what concern their presentation, it is also conspicuous that although gendered interpretations have a different focus, certain recurring commonplace are found with every the depiction of every gendered character. Such a fact may indicate a correspondence between the main ladies of the Apocalypse, which will be dealt with extensively at later point in my current analysis.

Whereas the contrastive scheme, as well the dichotomized appearance of gendered characters in the Apocalypse has textual support, I cannot however agree to their objectification in terms of male desire, as proposed by Tina Pippin, nor to the generalization that can be applicable to all Christian communities of believers.

I do agree however, that a lot of erotic capital is invested in their presentation, but their gendered character cannot be reduced to this one single dimension.

As a result, the symbols enunciated by Yarbrow Collins, respectively 'mother', 'prostitute', 'bride' do not operate individually at the level of the Apocalypse. While it is true that only one dimension is more dominant, several titles can apply to one gendered character.

To exemplify with the Great Whore, she is deemed 'prostitute', 'mother', and may even be conceived (in virtue of her posture) as the 'bride' of the Beast. Additionally, intimate relations are not entirely definitory for her relationship with the kings of the earth. As previously alluded the fornication with the kings is not only *attributed*, but also envisioned as a relation of dominance. Similarly, her fornication with the kings of the earth does not make the Great Whore a queen.

Moreover, the fact that gendered characters are defined in terms of reproductive roles does not apply to the character of the Great Whore: her being labelled as 'mother' is not to be understood literally, in a biological sense, but metaphorically, as generator of evil.

In my view, Sutter Rehmann's formulation concerning male control as discerning category between evil and good gendered characters throughout Apocalypse should be a bit more nuanced. As a result, the concept of 'male control' could be replaced by 'divine protection'. The latter is a concept, which does not necessarily touch upon generic aspects.

I am ready to accept Selvidge's observations referring to good and evil 'women' only at an emotional level. The adjectives enumerated may turn out to be 'too much' for any serious exegete to consider.

The relation between text and reality was also previously touched upon, with regard to the image of the Great Whore as [problematic] metaphor. It was then concluded that not only

⁶⁸⁷ Pippin, *Death and Desire*, 72. A somehow similar view has also Yarbrow Collins in her article, 'Feminine Symbolism and the Book of Revelation a' where she discusses the effect of the archetypal gender reading (cf. 27).

texts construct gendered images, but also perceptions of reality influence the manner in which texts operate.

As word of caution, the main danger with some postmodern interpretations that glorify, or over-victimize negative gendered-informed models, such as the Great Whore is that they could make us question in this respect, our Christian ideal, values, principles etc. It is for reason that this emotional trap should be though acknowledged, eluded. The arguments stemming from a purely emotional interpretation of the Great Whore cannot claim any type of validity. Also, they are not representative for any type of women's experience.

Women's experience is far more complex and varied, as well as informed to various extents by the Christian character permeating the Apocalypse.

Briefly, the problem with this envisioning of 'woman' as well as its associations in the Apocalypse is very clearly expressed by Susan Garrett in her contribution to the *Women's Bible Commentary*. She states that while "each of these symbols reflects the male-centered view of the first century [...], the stereotyped feminine images in the book do not represent the full spectrum of authentic womanhood, either in John's day or in our own."⁶⁸⁸

This is a practical observation. In other words, reading too much into the generic aspects of the Apocalypse could be detrimental and reductionist, even for a contextual approach, such as the postmodern gender-informed one.

⁶⁸⁸ Garrett, Revelation, 469.

Seated

Next, the woman's posture comes into focus.

Just like the angel's introduction in v.1, the Seer records the first attribute of the woman,⁶⁸⁹ namely she is καθημένη –seated/sitting (cf. 17:1b.3b.9, 18:7).

Nevertheless, her seat changes, from 'waters' to 'beast' and to 'mountains'. In the introduction of the vision, she was seated upon many waters.

In this particular verse, she is actually reported as seated 'upon a scarlet beast' –ἐπὶ θηρίου κόκκινον (vv.3a.7).

In these instances, the active middle participle present of the verb κάθηναι is used, probably denoting a *passivum divinum*. The Whore could be placed upon the Beast, not by her own will, but by a force superseding her, most probably God.

Her posture may indicate that the Beast is her throne of (eschatological) judgment before God. In view of the latter actions taken against the Great Whore by the coalition of kings, including the Beast resulting into her demise (cf.17:16) confirm the above observation.

Additionally, sitting is part of the Whore's own characterization in 18:7. Another meaning of κάθηναι is equivalent to "occupy a throne" or "to reign"⁶⁹⁰ –κάθηναι βασίλισσα.

Because extensive analysis was conducted with the first occurrence of the Whore being seated (17: 1c), I will not repeat the details of the analysis here.

References of the verb κάθηναι and its variants evidentiate a mark of high distinction.⁶⁹¹

Coupling the textual references in 18:7 with 17:18, respectively that the woman, identified as city rules over the kings of the earth –ἔχουσα βασιλείαν ἐπὶ τῶν βασιλέων τῆς γῆς, the verb in question implies a relation of dominance.⁶⁹²

Two observations are imposed at this level.

Firstly, the latter interpretative variant could account for all the objects of the verb κάθηναι discussed previously, namely 'waters' (17:1b.15), 'kings of the earth' (17:2a.9), 'inhabitants of the earth' (17:2b. 15). All these elements may be conceived of under the Whore's dominance.

⁶⁸⁹ I hope it was clear by this moment, that by 'woman' I mean the textual reference as per the Apocalypse. I am not referring therefore to character 'in the flesh'. The Great Whore remains essentially a gendered character or image.

⁶⁹⁰ Louw-Nida, *Greek- English Lexicon of the New Testament*, Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 930.

⁶⁹¹ Cf. the reference to the Son of Man in Matt 26:64: "you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power" –ἀπ' ἄρτι ὄψεσθε τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ ἀνθρώπου καθήμενον ἐκ δεξιῶν τῆς δυνάμεως.

⁶⁹² Lupieri, *A Commentary on the Apocalypse*, 252; Cf. Pezzoli-Olgia, *Zwischen Gericht und Heil*, 84.

Because of this, I would ascribe ἐπὶ θηρίον κόκκινον other meaning, rather than location. I choose to interpret this deictic in view of dominion, or as directly expressing the power relations between the Whore and the Beast.

Secondly, if we further analyze the implications of sitting, an intratextual dialogue with the heavenly throne vision of Rev 4-5⁶⁹³ could be highlighted. The Whore sitting is nothing but a contrasting image of God, ὁ καθήμενος ἐπὶ τὸν θρόνον (4:2.3).⁶⁹⁴

The reign of God aims to benefit ‘every tribe and tongue and people and nation’ (5:9; cf. 7:9 and 14:6), whereas the Whore’s brings about nothing but enslavement, fornication – πορνεία and deceitfulness – φαρμακεία aiming to destroy. Therefore, the punishment is justified (17:16).

The participial form ὁ καθήμενος has a very old tradition in Judaism, confirming thus the already delineated context as God’s attribute.

Baruch 2:11-3:8 features a prayer of deliverance, in which God is referred to as ‘the one who reigns forever’ –ὁ καθήμενος τὸν αἰῶνα. Similar or comparable uses feature God sitting is on a throne –ἐπὶ τοῦ θρόνου –which can be either God’s (Sir 1:8), or Israel’s (1 Kgs 8:25, 2 Chr 6:16), or David’s (Jer 22: 2.30, 43:30). In addition, God is also enthroned above the cherubs –ἐπὶ τῶν χειρουβιν (2 Kgs 19:15, Dan 3:55, Psalm 79:2, 98:1, Odes 8:5, Isa 37:16). By extension, there are also references to heaven as God’s throne (Isa 66:1, Psalm 10:4).

In this particular vision, instead of the throne, the Whore sits ἐπὶ θηρίον κόκκινον (v. 3b, 7c). The above mentioned parallels aimed at proving that the woman’s posture is if not God-like, at least one of authority. If we consider proper worship⁶⁹⁵ as the focal point of

⁶⁹³ The heavenly throne vision as a whole echoes Isa 6:1 –the revelation of God sitting upon his throne –and Ezek 1:26.28 where a human-like figure is seated on a throne located in heaven.

⁶⁹⁴ Cf. Rev 4:2.3.10, 5: 1.7, 6:2.5.8.16, 7:15, 14:16, 19:11, 21:5.

The throne –θρόνος as the symbol of God’s presence appears 40 times in the Revelation and is shared only with the Lamb (22:1.3). (Christiane Zimmermann, *Die Namen des Vaters. Studien zu ausgewählten neutestamentlichen Gottesbezeichnungen und ihrem frühjüdischen und paganen Sprachhorizont* (Ancient Judaism and Christianity 69), Brill: Leiden, 2007, 263).

⁶⁹⁵ Jörg Frey, *The Relevance of the Roman Imperial Cult for the Book of Revelation. Exegetical and Hermeneutical Reflections on the Relation between the Seven Letters and the Visionary Main Part of the Book*, in: John Fotopulos (ed.), *The New Testament and Early Christian Literature in Graeco-Roman Context. Studies in the Honour of David E. Aune* (Supplements Novum Testamentum 122), Leiden: Brill, 2006, 231-155, 253; cf. Steve J. Friesen, *Imperial Cults and the Apocalypse of John. Reading Revelation in the Ruins*, Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2001, 202.

the Book of Revelation, then the Whore's sitting could be a parody, an audacious imitation⁶⁹⁶ of God, a *hubris* for which she will be severely punished.

As further point of contrast, the Whore's sitting could be further opposed to the horse riders, harbingers of God's judgments. Rev 6:2 features a white horse and its rider –ἵππος λευκός, καὶ ὁ καθήμενος ἐπ' αὐτόν, 6:4 a red horse and its rider –ἵππος πυρρός, καὶ τῷ καθημένῳ ἐπ' αὐτόν, 6:5 a black horse and its rider ἵππος μέλας, καὶ ὁ καθήμενος ἐπ' αὐτόν, 6:8 a pale green horse and its rider –ἵππος χλωρός, καὶ ὁ καθήμενος ἐπάνω αὐτοῦ. Besides the fact that these four bring about Conquest, War, Famine, Death, their postures are referred to by means of a participial construction, just like in the Whore's case, derived from the verb κάθηναι, respectively καθήμενος, often translated as 'riding', or 'mounted'.

As another point of disparity, Ruiz advances the reference in 19:11, where "the λόγος, mounted on a white horse is followed by heavenly armies also mounted on white horses [...] contrasts directly with the πόρνη and her mount."⁶⁹⁷

It is probably because of this reason that the Whore is referred to as 'riding the Beast'.⁶⁹⁸ Because of the lack of Biblical parallels,⁶⁹⁹ other deities, represented as riding animals could have prompted the image of the woman seated on a scarlet beast.⁷⁰⁰

I have however, doubts regarding the translation of καθήμενη ἐπὶ θηρίον as "riding", mainly in view of the parallels with other deities, because as Mowinckel contends, "the gods of Mesopotamians and Assyrians are never conceived or depicted as riding on horseback",⁷⁰¹ or that Hittite gods standing upon real and monstrous animals "have nothing to do with riding". Beasts functioned as pedestals in cases above.⁷⁰²

⁶⁹⁶ Rissi contends that in the Book of Revelation „das Gottfeindliche imitiert das Goettliche“ (Rissi, *Die Verführung*, 51).

⁶⁹⁷ Ruiz, *Ezekiel in The Apocalypse*, 317.

⁶⁹⁸ Paul B. Duff has even entitled one of his books *Who Rides the Beast? Prophetic Rivalry and the Rhetoric of Crisis in the Churches of the Apocalypse*. Cf. Prigent, *Commentary on the Apocalypse of St. John* 487, Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 853.

⁶⁹⁹ Kowalski, *Die Rezeption des Propheten Ezechiel*, 180; cf. Prigent, *Commentary on the Apocalypse of St. John*, 487.

⁷⁰⁰ Cf. Gunkel, *Schöpfung und Chaos*, 365 alludes to mother-goddess tradition; François Bovon, Possession ou enchantement: les institutions romaines selon L'Apocalypse de Jean, in: *Christianesimo nella storia* 7/1986, 221-238, 234 and Prigent, *Commentary on the Apocalypse of St. John* (n. 5, 487) suggests Cybele, accompanied by felines (cf. Bovon, Possession ou enchantement, 234); Aune, *Revelation 17-22* refers to Thea Rome –as part of an *ekphrasis*, or even the Mesopotamian deity, Inana. Cf. Sigmund Mowinckel, Drive and/or Ride in Old Testament in: *Vetus Testamentum* 12/1962, 278-299.

⁷⁰¹ Mowinckel, Drive and/or Ride, 280.

⁷⁰² Mowinckel, Drive and /or Ride, 295-296.

Of all observations, I would like to highlight that the choice of her posture aims rhetorically at establishing a counterpart to God, or God's agents via intratextual links. The intertextual references support such claims, illuminating on the character of the woman.

In doing so, it creates a horizon of expectation, in which her punishment is well deserved, her fraudulent demeanour exposed.

Upon a scarlet beast

In what follows, the Whore's seat, a beast –θηρίον is described as scarlet –κόκκινον (v.3b), full of blasphemous names –γέμον ὀνόματα βλασφημίας (v.3b), having seven heads and ten horns –ἔχον κεφαλὰς ἑπτὰ καὶ κέρατα δέκα (vv.3b.7c). The *angelus interpretes* offers explanation only for the last two attributes concerning the seven heads and ten horns.

In view of the meaning implied by the participial construction above, respectively that of sitting, the posture of the woman could shed light on the association with the Beast, in terms of the animalistic nature of both, also on the type of the exciting relationship between the two: the woman subdues the Beast.

Considering this aspect, useful information on the Great Whore's characterization could be provided by analyzing in depth the meaning, implications and associations of 'beast' in the Apocalypse. The Biblical context helps in contouring the reader's horizon with regard to the identity and function of the Whore.

References to beasts (or beast-like creatures) are not at all new in the Apocalypse. These employ related *topoi* (colour, heads, horns, words of blasphemy) in their description and function.

Despite the fact that θηρίον is anarthrous, the subsequent articular uses of this noun in the immediate context, mentioned nine times in this chapter in 17:7.8 (x2).11.12.13.16.17 are anaphoric to 17:3.

Ruiz explains the anarthrous character of the Beast as "a characteristic feature of the author's style, this presentation of already somewhat familiar imagery as though for the first time serves to refocus the image and to redirect it in the new context in which the reader finds it". In doing so, the author justifies the link with other creatures and maintains "a balance between the continuity of his metaphoric language throughout the book and the introduction of new motifs."⁷⁰³

⁷⁰³ Ruiz, *Ezekiel in the Apocalypse*, 318.

For this reason, a comparison with other ‘beastly’ occurrences in the Apocalypse aid in understanding the use and meaning of the image of the Beast. The observations resulting from the comparison between the intratextual references to the Beast will be presented below, concluding with an assessment.

Table 2

Beast in 12	Beast in 13: 1-10	Beast in 13:11-18	Beast 17:3
καὶ ἰδοὺ δράκων μέγας πυρρὸς (And behold a great red <i>dragon</i>) (12:3)	καὶ εἶδον ἐκ τῆς θαλάσσης θηρίον ἀναβαῖνον (And I saw a <i>beast</i> rising out of the sea) (13:1)	Καὶ εἶδον ἄλλο θηρίον ἀναβαῖνον ἐκ τῆς γῆς (And I saw another <i>beast</i> rising out the earth) (13:11)	(καὶ εἶδον) θηρίον κόκκινον (And I saw a scarlet <i>beast</i>) (17:3) <hr/> καὶ μέλλει ἀναβαίνειν ἐκ τῆς ἀβύσσου (καὶ εἰς ἀπώλειαν ὑπάγει) (And [the beast] is about to ascend from the abyss and go to destruction) (17:8)
ἔχων κεφαλὰς ἑπτὰ καὶ κέρατα δέκα (Having seven heads and ten horns) (12:3)	ἔχον κέρατα δέκα καὶ κεφαλὰς ἑπτὰ (Having ten horns and seven heads) (13:1) Note! reversed order		ἔχων κεφαλὰς ἑπτὰ καὶ κέρατα δέκα. (Having seven heads and ten horns) (17:3)
καὶ ἐπὶ τὰς κεφαλὰς αὐτοῦ ἑπτὰ διαδήματα (And on his heads seven diadems) (12:3)	καὶ ἐπὶ τὰς κεφαλὰς αὐτοῦ ὀνόματα βλασφημίας (And on its heads blasphemous names) (13:1)		Αἱ ἑπτὰ κεφαλαὶ ἑπτὰ ὄρη εἰσὶν, ὅπου ἡ γυνὴ κάθεται ἐπ’ αὐτῶν. καὶ βασιλεῖς ἑπτὰ εἰσιν· (And the seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman sits, and they are seven kings) (17:9)
			γέμον[τα] ὀνόματα βλασφημίας (Full of blasphemous names) (17:3)
	καὶ ἐπὶ τῶν κεράτων αὐτοῦ δέκα διαδήματα	εἶχεν κέρατα δύο ὅμοια ἄρνιω	Καὶ τὰ δέκα κέρατα ἃ εἶδες δέκα βασιλεῖς εἰσιν

	(And on its horns ten diadems) (13:1)	(It had two horns like a lamb) (13:11)	(And the ten horns which you saw are ten kings) (17:12)
	Καὶ ἐδόθη αὐτῷ στόμα λαλοῦν μεγάλα καὶ βλασφημίας And [the beast] was given a mouth uttering haughty and blasphemous words (13:5) καὶ ἤνοιξεν τὸ στόμα αὐτοῦ εἰς βλασφημίας πρὸς τὸν θεὸν βλασφημῆσαι τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ (And he opened his mouth to utter blasphemies against God, blaspheming his name) (13:6)	καὶ ἐλάλει ὡς δράκων (And spoke like a dragon) (13:11)	
καὶ ἐβλήθη ὁ δράκων ὁ μέγας, ὁ ὄφις ὁ ἀρχαῖος, ὁ καλούμενος Διάβολος καὶ ὁ Σατανᾶς, ὁ πλανῶν τὴν οἰκουμένην ὅλην (And the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient <i>serpent</i> , who is called the Devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world) (12:9)			

In the comparative scheme above, I chose the following parametres: the etymology of words denoting beasts, their origin, colour, as well as other *topoi* in their description, royal implications, but also the occurrence of ‘blasphemous words’.

First, I would have to underline the distinction (if any) between ‘dragon’ –δράκων and ‘beast’ –θηρίον. Named differently, they seem to merge. This is buttressed by the fact that the beast in 13:11 speaks like a dragon.

Even if one takes them separately, they operate identically. The beasts' names indicate forces opposing God. Their common animalistic feature, either alone or by association, places them in an antagonistic relation to those defined as the agents of God.

Leaving aside the same formal entrance for the beasts (using εἶδον in 13:1.11, 17:3b, and ἰδοὺ in 12:3), the origin of the beasts in Rev 13 and 17 is mentioned by the use of the verb ἀναβαίνειν.

One beast is rising ἐκ τῆς θαλάσσης (13:1), the other ἐκ τῆς γῆς (13:11), while in 17, the beast is rising ἐκ τῆς ἀβύσσου (17:8, but also 11:7).

These latter mentions may be implying that the Beasts' abodes are located on earth, or more specifically, under the earth. Alternatively, the references may be an indicative of the Beasts' lowest rank in the creation hierarchy.

The colour of the beasts is mentioned in two instances: in chapter 12, the dragon is red – πυρρός and in chapter 17 the beast is scarlet – κόκκινος. As these seem to be shades of red, their connection bears further significance.

The description of the beasts in chapters 12:1, 13:1-10 and 17:3 includes seven heads and ten horns – κεφαλὰς ἑπτὰ καὶ κέρατα δέκα.

The seven heads correspond to kings – βασιλεῖς (17:9) and the same is implied in 12:3 by diadems – διαδήματα.

The ten horns – reduced to two in 13:11 – are interpreted as well as βασιλεῖς (17:9), which would be then consistent with the διαδήματα of 12:3 and 13:1.

The heads of the Dragon in 12:3 each carry seven diadems, whereas in 13:1, the ten horns of the first beast are crowned.

In contrast to these occurrences, the Beast in 17:3 does not have any diadem. Neither its horns, nor its heads are depicted as crowned. Nevertheless, the royal connection is established otherwise, by reference to its horns (17:12).

The words of blasphemy – βλασφημίας occur with the descriptions of the beasts in 13:1-10 (v.1.5.6) being paralleled with 17:3b.

The beast of 17 is full of blasphemous names – γέμον[τα] ὀνόματα βλασφημίας, while 13:1 records them on its (i.e. the beast's) head – ἐπὶ τὰς κεφαλὰς αὐτοῦ.

At the same time, the beast of 13:1-10 utters arrogant words – μεγάλα (Dan 7:20, 13:5) against God and His name (13:6).

Such close connectedness between the elements of the two entities' description has prompted Yarbrow Collins to consider the current Beast to be either identical or equivalent to the beast in chapter 13.⁷⁰⁴ If accepted that the Beast of chapter 13 coincides with the

⁷⁰⁴ Yarbrow Collins, art. Revelation, in: *NIBC*, 1012.

one of our chapter, Beale conceives the latter's appearance as another episode in the Beast's career.⁷⁰⁵

In 12:9, the dragon is followed by the apposition "that ancient serpent, who is called the Devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world" –ὁ ὄφις ὁ ἀρχαῖος ὁ καλούμενος Διάβολος καὶ ὁ Σατανᾶς, ὁ πλανῶν τὴν οἰκουμένην ὅλην (alluding to Gen 3:15) which illuminates on the demonic origins of the one dragon.

Besides the satanic associations, in OT and early Jewish symbolism, the dragon is historically personified as Nebuchadnezzar⁷⁰⁶ (ὡς δράκων, Jer 51:34), while the Psalms of Solomon 2:29, point at Pompey.⁷⁰⁷ Psalm 73:13-14 mean the Egyptian Pharaoh, so does Isa 51:9, Ezek 29:3, 32:2. Considering the context created above, one could also add the aspect of idolatry to 13:4.8, where the appearance of the Beast implies an attitude of worship (προσκυνέω) on the behalf of οἱ κατοικοῦντες ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς.

In addition, regarding the intertextual connections, Dan 7:2-7.20.24 may have been a major influence in construing the image of the beast(s), bearing very close resemblances with the aforementioned texts.⁷⁰⁸

The particular cross-reference operates as anchor-points: the presence of horns and heads in the descriptions of beasts, their number, as well as the subsequent interpretation of them as crowns represent a symbol Daniel utilizes for kings/ kingdoms (Dan 7: 23.24).

Summary

Given the above information resulted from intratextual associations, one could easily fill in relevant information on the Beast's nature. The reader is able to construe an expectation horizon meant to help identifying the perpetrators, the enemies of God in the Apocalypse.

The beasts and dragon of the Apocalypse feature as symbol for Chaos (12:4-5). They stand up as forces against God,⁷⁰⁹ destroyers of the order of Creation. These instances bring up

⁷⁰⁵ Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 853.

⁷⁰⁶ G. C. Heider, art. 'Tannin', in: Karel van der Toorn, Bob Becking, Pieter Willem van der Horst (eds.), *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible* (2nd edition extensively revised), Brill: Leiden, 1999, 834-836, 836.

⁷⁰⁷ Prigent, *Commentary on the Apocalypse of St. John*, 381: cf. Friesen, *Imperial Cults and the Apocalypse of John*, 195ff.

⁷⁰⁸ Ruiz, *Ezekiel in The Apocalypse*, 319; Rissi, *Die Verführung*, 31ff, cf. Lupieri, *A Commentary on the Apocalypse of John*, 276.

associations with the Leviathan (Psalm 74:12-17), or Rahab motif (Isa 51:9), where God's victory over them is certain.

For this reason, their characterization and function bears most often political and cultic undertones.

Standing in close innertextual relation to chapter 13 –referring to the emperor's cult⁷¹⁰ – the Beast could be largely identified with the Roman Empire.⁷¹¹ “This was an expectation prevalent from 90 AD onward in many Christian communities,”⁷¹² argues Frey. Similarly, he contends that whereas the Beast in chapter 13 focuses on the military power of the empire, the beast in chapter 17 stresses the economic aspects, in visualizing the empire's power of seduction.⁷¹³

In this study, this aspect is touched upon only indirectly, by means of association with the Whore and only in view of chapter 18.

For this reason, and of course because of the explanation offered by the *angelus interpretes*, in which he identifies the ‘woman’ with a ‘city’ (v.18), the Whore is considered the city of Rome, while the Beast remains associated with the Roman Empire.

Such a geopolitical identification hints indirectly to the identity of the Whore, the doublet of the Beast, which is popular with exegetes, representatives of the historical-critical method.

The woman's depiction as sitting on a beast as well as the interaction with the Beast could be ascribed a moral value, i.e. fornication.⁷¹⁴ Based on the already accomplished association/ identification of the Beast with the Roman Empire and of the Whore with Rome,⁷¹⁵ commentators describe her as fornicating with her own empire.⁷¹⁶

Just as the Whore was previously described as seated, now the adjective ‘scarlet’ κόκκινον is the first to delineate the Beast.

⁷⁰⁹ Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 853.

⁷¹⁰ Prigent, *Commentary on the Apocalypse of St. John*, 487, Yarbrow Collins, art. Revelation, in: *NIBC*, 1012, also Frey, *The Relevance of the Roman Imperial Cult*, 231-255.

⁷¹¹ Prigent, *Commentary on the Apocalypse of St. John*; cf. Aune, *Revelation 17-22*; Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Revelation of St. John*, 2: 64; also cf. Friesen, *Imperial Cults and the Apocalypse of John*, 202-204; Yarbrow Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis*, 148.

⁷¹² Although he fails to mention any of the sources, he refers in making such a statement.

⁷¹³ Frey, *The Relevance of the Roman Imperial Cult*, 237-238.

⁷¹⁴ Lupieri, *A Commentary on the Apocalypse*, 252, cf. Sals, *Die Biographie*, 104.

⁷¹⁵ This aspect is dealt with at a subsequent point.

⁷¹⁶ Lupieri, *A Commentary on the Apocalypse*, 252. Others deem such behaviour unlikely, therefore indicate Jerusalem as the potential entity behind the Whore (Lupieri, *A Commentary on the Apocalypse*, 252).

As mentioned previously, κόκκινος is a shade of red mentioned with two of the beasts' descriptions in the Apocalypse. Prigent has noted however that this colour does not refer to the colour of the Beast's skin, but to a piece of cloth wrapped around the Beast.⁷¹⁷ Alternatively, it may refer to the trappings of the Beast.⁷¹⁸

Because there is nothing indicating such suppositions, Ruiz points at the similitude between the colour worn by the Prostitute, as described in the following verse (v. 4) and the Beast. Similarly, he registers 'scarlet' within the same spectrum of colour displayed with the Dragon in Rev 12. The Beast is ensuingly "an agent of Satan".⁷¹⁹

Given the high costs to produce the scarlet dye in the first place, it has been linked with people of certain socio-economic status, i.e. kings.

'Scarlet' is therefore the colour of Roman royalty,⁷²⁰ indicating wealth and status for which a long list of references testify.⁷²¹ At the same time, scarlet also features with the clothes of Jewish priests,⁷²² (Exod 28:5.8.15.33) as well as with the tabernacle (Exod 26:1, 36:8, Num 4:8, 2 Chr 3:14).

Within the Apocalypse, the same colour features in the Whore's attire, being also mentioned on the list of fine merchandises of the following chapter (18:2).

Due to the ambivalence contained by the double stress on 'scarlet' as per the description of Babylon and of the Great Whore, I argue it has a deeper meaning than just colour. Just as all the other elements presented so far, scarlet bears ultimately a moral valence. The textual allusion thus helps the readers once again to confirm their assumptions regarding the character judged.

An interpretation like this is buttressed by the OT context.

⁷¹⁷ Prigent, *Commentary on the Apocalypse of St. John*, 487.

⁷¹⁸ Beckwith, *The Apocalypse of John*, 693.

⁷¹⁹ Ruiz, *Ezekiel in The Apocalypse*, 321; cf. Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, 429.

⁷²⁰ Cf. Judg 8:26 to refer to the clothes of the king of Midian; Ruiz, *Ezekiel in The Apocalypse*, 320.

⁷²¹ Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 935. He mentions 2 Sam 1:24, Prov. 31:21, Jer. 4:30, Epictetus, *Discourses* 3.22.10, 4.11.34, repeated in the same order by Blount, *Revelation*, 314.

⁷²² Lupieri, *A Commentary on the Apocalypse*, 253.

The optical contrast is also evident in the Apocalypse, for 'scarlet' opposes the white of the Lamb and the robes of the elders (4:4) and the 144,000 redeemed (7:9).

Scarlet has clearly a significant moral value in Isa 1:18, since the sins are like scarlet –[αἱ ἁμαρτίαι ὑμῶν] ὡς κόκκινον, being, in this manner, contrasted with the white of the snow (ὡς χιόνα λευκανῶ) or, with that of that of the wool (ὡς ἔριον λευκανῶ).⁷²³

These instances substantiate the hypothesis that this colour or nuances of it depict the enemies of God. As such, wearing scarlet also connotes with arrogance⁷²⁴ and possibly persecution.

Besides its colour, the Beast is complemented with two other descriptive phrases: it is “full of names of blasphemy” –γέμον[τα] ὀνόματα βλασφημίας and has “seven heads and ten horns” –ἔχων κεφαλὰς ἑπτὰ καὶ κέρατα δέκα). These attributes are derived⁷²⁵ from the description of the Beast in 13:1.

Full of blasphemous names

The first phrase describing the Beast is considered to be a Semitism.⁷²⁶ In Greek, γέμω –‘to fill’ should usually be followed by a genitive of content, and not the accusative.

In fact, this form is the first of the two occurrences with the accusative in the Apocalypse (also in 17:4c). Elsewhere (4:6.8, 5:8, 15:7, 17:4c, 21:9), the verb is used with genitive, as certified by other NT uses, such as in Mat 23:25.27, Luke 11:39, Rom 3:14.⁷²⁷

Aune records a similar use of γέμω with the accusative in Exod 1:7, 8:17 and Ezek 39:20 and as such “it may reflect a a literal translation of the Hebrew verb מִלֵּא used with the accusative of material”.⁷²⁸ This construction is relevant for the current use, as the participial form of γέμειν is followed by a neuter noun in the accusative, plural.⁷²⁹

⁷²³ Rissi, *Die Verführung*, 50.

⁷²⁴ Prigent, *Commentary on the Apocalypse of St. John*, 487.

⁷²⁵ Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 934.

⁷²⁶ Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 908.

⁷²⁷ Also Henry Barclay Swete, *Commentary on Revelation. The Greek Text with Introduction, Notes and Indexes*, Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1977, 215.

⁷²⁸ Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 908.

⁷²⁹ There are several textual variants one notes, regarding the forms, because the space between the words were not used neither in papyri, not in uncial MSS.

Some of these variants include γέμον ὀνόματα (Byzantine), γέμον ὀνομάτων (Andreas Hippolitus). Another variants list γέμων ὀνόματα, as well as γέμωντα ὀνόματα. (For an extensive use per occurrence in variant codices cf. Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 908, Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Revelation of St. John*, 2:337-338, Ruiz, *Ezekiel in the Apocalypse*, 321f). γέμοντα ὀνόματα is another form, in which γέμοντα is either participle present active accusative neuter plural or it can also be a participle present active masculine singular modifying the neuter singular noun in accusative θηρίον.

Name –ὄνομα is very important in the Apocalypse. It can refer to the actual naming of a person (9:1, 2:13, 3:12, 11:8, 22:4, and 19:12.13.19). While also denoting the generic term for “person” in 3:4, or 11:13, it can be understood as “reputation” or “fame” in 3:1. However, the most important meaning for the Apocalypse is noted when ὄνομα implies “belonging”.

In the dichotomic world of the Apocalypse, the ones belonging to God, marked by a seal – σφραγίς (7:3ff, 9:4, 14:1, 22:4) are contrasted with the ones bearing the name of the Beast (13:17, 14:11).

The latter reference is found also in the OT, which praises the beneficial associations with the name of God in Num 6:23, Isa 43:7.

The high priest wears a golden diadem on which is engraved “Holy to the Lord” (Exod 28:36).

By contrast, in this particular instance in the Apocalypse we are not dealing with a holy name, but rather with names of blasphemy ὀνόματα βλασφημίας.

This phrasing is not unknown to us, for such a denomination features in 13:1. The term βλασφημίας functions as a qualitative genitive used in place of an adjective⁷³⁰ and therefore translated as ‘names of blasphemy’.

Previously, βλασφημία was mentioned in the previous chapter, in 16:9.11.21 as representing “the human reaction against God which is provoked by the bowl plagues”.⁷³¹

Then, as evident from Table 2, blasphemies denote the Beast’s speech (13:5-6). More concretely, in virtue of the intratextual link with the Beast of 13 (cf. 13:4-8, 14-15) it may signify that the Beast arrogates upon itself the title as ‘god of this world’.⁷³² Additionally,

To account for the gender incongruence, Charles suggests this phrase is an example of a *constructio ad sensum* in which the masculinization of the neuter θηρίον would trigger the masculine gender of the participial clause as well as the pronouns. (Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Revelation of St. John*, 2:64; cf. Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 908).

Examples of the latter type can be found in 17:11.16. (Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 908).

The other scriptural variant (Nestle Aland version) is γέμον τα ὀνόματα, in which τα is taken as a definite article to ὀνόματα preceded participle present active accusative neuter singular. In this case, it is an anaphoric reference to the anarthrous ὀνόματα of Rev 13:1, so the author is thus attempting to textually link the two chapters as shown above with other elements. (Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 908).

⁷³⁰ Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 908.

⁷³¹ Ruiz, *Ezekiel in the Apocalypse*, 322.

⁷³² Osborne, *Revelation*, 611.

blasphemies are paired with μεγάλα in 13:5, but they can be also found intertextually with Dan 7:8.11.20.25, but also 11:36.

In Apocalypse 13, the names of blasphemy are on the beast's heads, whereas with Apocalypse 17, they can be interpreted as covering⁷³³ the body of the beast. Given the historical context,⁷³⁴ the meaning of ὀνόματα βλασφημίας was also enriched. They included defamations, insults addressed to God, "arrogant words [...] expressing a pretension of divinity"⁷³⁵ considering deifying the emperor was very strong in Asia Minor. It could also imply the titles held by the Roman emperor, i.e. *augustus* "worthy of adoration"⁷³⁶ or "master and God" *dominus et deus*.

Blasphemy implies the pretension to be venerated as gods.⁷³⁷ It can be also detected in 2 Thess 2:3-4, where the man of lawlessness, the son of destruction –ὁ ἄνθρωπος τῆς ἀνομίας, ὁ υἱὸς τῆς ἀπωλείας is declaring himself to be God –ἀποδεικνύντα ἑαυτὸν ὅτι ἐστὶν θεός (cf. Asc. Isa 4:7-8⁷³⁸, where Beliar acts as an eschatological tyrant).

Such attitude is not common only with the Beast, for it will be mentioned also with the Whore, who ἐδόξασεν αὐτήν in Rev 18:7.

Thus, the sin of *hubris* will contribute to her violent demise mentioned in 17:16 and throughout the following chapter.

Having seven heads and ten horns

The other descriptive phrase referring to the Beast registers 'seven heads and ten horns'. Such a phrasing occurs in a reverse order in 13:1.

Besides a display of terribleness,⁷³⁹ I daresay it adds to its already established repulsiveness.

There are two variants: one reads ἔχων, the other ἔχον.

⁷³³ Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Revelation of St. John*, 2:64.

⁷³⁴ Chapter 13 is generally understood as referring to the emperor's cult.

⁷³⁵ Ellul, *The Book of Revelation*, 191; cf. Prigent, *Commentary on the Apocalypse of St. John*, 404.

⁷³⁶ Beckwith, *The Apocalypse of John*, 693; Prigent, *Commentary on the Apocalypse of St. John*, 405, also 488.

⁷³⁷ Prigent, *Commentary on the Apocalypse of St. John*, 408.

⁷³⁸ Paolo Betiollo et al. (eds.), *Ascensio Isaiae: Textus* (Corpus Christianorum Series Apocryphorum 7), Turnhout: Brepols, 1995.

⁷³⁹ Beckwith, *The Apocalypse of John*, 693.

The second form is considered a correction,⁷⁴⁰ an opinion also shared by Aune as “the corrected reading of 051 Byzantine Andreas Hippolytus (*de Ant.* 36), though it is possible that because of the o=ω interchange [...], ἔχον was pronounced ἔχων.”⁷⁴¹

However, in the variant I am currently analyzing, the main problem I encounter with the participial clause is that it does not agree with the head noun it describes, i.e. θηρίον: ἔχων is a participial masculine form in the nominative, which modifies θηρίον, a neuter, singular noun in the accusative.

Attempts to account for such disparity have been advanced.

Beale sees in this construction, a translation of the verb ἔχειν of Dan 7:7 with a participle construction with the purpose to attract an OT allusion.⁷⁴²

Many see this yet another *constructio ad sensum*, a masculine personification of the Beast (referring to the Roman emperor),⁷⁴³ but also argue such use was common in apocalyptic language, where “beasts symbolize human beings and nations.”⁷⁴⁴

The context in which θηρίον and δράκων operate is identical (cf. 12:9) so, this could explain the case difference discussed above.

I already mentioned previously that when paralleled with the other occurrences (see Table 2), three instances indicate the same description of the Beast as having κεφαλὰς ἑπτὰ καὶ κέρατα δέκα.

In all three occurrences, the seven heads carry either ‘seven crowns’ (12:3), ‘names of blasphemy’ (13:1), or the ‘Whore’ (17:9).

Later in this chapter, the heads receive a double interpretation as ‘kings’ (v.9), and as ‘mountains’ (v.9).

The first interpretation, i.e. as ‘kings’ is consistent with chapter 12. In addition, the number ‘seven’ indicates fullness of royal power. However, their placement (on a beast) and the association with a ‘whore’ would prompt the type of such power, respectively a demonic type of power.

The second interpretation, i.e. as ἑπτὰ ὄρη alludes to the OT symbolism of a mountain (Isa 2:2, Jer 51:25, Dan 2:35. 45) as indicative of power.

⁷⁴⁰ Swete, *Commentary on Revelation*, 215.

⁷⁴¹ Aune considers it a solecism, for the participial form ἔχον (both in nominative and accusative, but neuter in gender) would have been appropriate. Cf. Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 908.

⁷⁴² Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 854.

⁷⁴³ Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 908; Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 853, Frey, *The Relevance of the Roman Imperial Cult*, 238.

⁷⁴⁴ Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 908.

Commentators employing the historical-critical method are convinced the latter association, i.e. the woman seated on seven mountains (17:9) is a well-known reference to the popular depiction⁷⁴⁵ of the city Rome, corroborating it with the interpretation of 17:18.

The current study is not primarily interested in the identity of the Great Whore, but rather deals with the function or rhetorical value of the gendered image in particular on readers. The ten horns bear ten crowns in 13:1 implying again, royalty. This association is further consistent with the interpretation offered by the angel in 17:12. Such an image could be paralleled with Dan 7:7.24.

It is interesting to note the dynamics of the relationship between the Beast and its heads and horns, on the one hand, and that between the Whore and the Beast, on the other hand.

In 17:12, the ten horns, interpreted as kings reign with the Beast for one hour. God made it possible (v.17) by giving all authority to the Beast in order to fight against the Lamb (v.14). Nevertheless, the Lamb will defeat the Beast (cf. 17:14).

Alternatively, the Beast is carrying the Whore (17:3.8). In addition, in v.9 she is seated on its heads. Such a relationship could be conceived in terms of an alliance. Towards the end of the chapter, however, the Beast will wage war against the Whore (17:16). More specifically, its horns together with the Beast itself offer her a violent death, for which Ruiz is convinced to “draw clear literary inspiration from Ezek 16:39, 23:29”.⁷⁴⁶

Summary

Relevant elements in the vision bear a feminist substance. Starting with the use of the verb of perception ὁράω that records the events of the vision in a highly perspectival view and continuing with the gynomorphic apparition from the desert, and her posture, all these elements prompt a deliberate rhetorical construction, in which the reader is also involved with his/her senses.

Ulrike Sals⁷⁴⁷ interprets the woman of this verse in terms of normality: what we encounter as reader is now a woman. The previous subunit dealt with the presentation of an abnormal woman, i.e. a whore.

⁷⁴⁵ Actually Rome is known as the city of the seven hills (Virgil, *Georgics* 2.535; Horace, *Carmen Saecularae* 7; Cicero, *Ad Atticum*, 6.5). Also Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 920-928.

⁷⁴⁶ Ruiz, *Ezekiel in the Apocalypse*, 323.

⁷⁴⁷ Sals, *Die Biographie*, 68.

Indeed, the Seer envisions a 'woman', which is different from the appellation of the angel, respectively a 'whore'. Internal evidence points at the unity between the two utilized concepts.

Because of the formulation above, the great bulk of some postmodern feminist claims read in John's identification a misogynist tone.

The gender-related observations resulted from the exegetical analysis were not particularly flattering for images of depictions of women. They are defined and reduced to their biological capacities, strongly dichotomized into good and evil, into passive and active. Gendered images in the Apocalypse display concrete literal uses, but also extend to the metaphoric level, in order to provide abundant substance for gender-informed claims.

The posture of the woman and her throne-like seat were analyzed. Subsequently, her posture points entirely to her dominant and potentially repressive character, which besides the intratextual references in Apocalypse is amply documented by other ancient works.

At the same time, in view of her association with a Beast, the Great Whore is put at the same level with an animal, thus alluding to her animalistic nature, but also to the impossibility of controlling her sexual instincts. This is totally in accordance with the previous subsection, where the gendered character was introduced as a woman driven by her strong sexual appetite, i.e. a whore.

In virtue of the debated associations, the readers' horizon of expectation is both confirmed and expanded with respect to understanding the character of the Prostitute, her potential and function overall in the Apocalypse.

The *topoi* used to describe the Beast are not at all new for the readers of the Apocalypse as it was shown in Table 2.

Gradually, the political dimension of a historical-critical method is brought into the limelight. As the perspective is buttressed by the further presentation of the Beast's characteristics, possible gender-informed substance is concretized.

Her posture, as 'riding' the Beast is completed by other threats of a political nature, which most of the non-feminist exegetes indicate to stem from the identification of the woman in the vision of Apocalypse 17 with the city of Rome.

However, it is not my intent to overfocus on the political aspect of the image, simply because the gendered depiction here bears other implications of interest, probably, if not equally important, then at least, full of feminist substance.

Given the larger frame of an apocalyptic vision, the designation here –'woman' is not to be taken at a face value, but should be evaluated from the prism of its rhetorical function.

Secondarily, by associations resulting from comparisons and contrasts, or even indirectly, a moral portrait of the Whore is slowly concretized aiming at clarifying the cause for the judgment pronounced by the angel in the first subsection of chapter 17.

3.3. Provisional Assessment (3)

The analysis of v.3 has provided important information with respect to the gender-informed focus.

The Whore characterized directly, but also indirectly, by means of subtle hints regarding her location, her posture, as well as counterparts.

Such features expand further on the image of the Whore and give depth to her character. These could possibly assist us in decoding attitudes John may have had concerning this character.

Once the gynomorphic description unfolds, the character amasses gradually negative connotations. Starting with the abnormality in terms of moral character, continuing with its theological implications aiming at slandering God, either by means of posture or appearance, the woman is attributed some sort of political power.

These are the main motifs of the section.

The demonic implication of the posture of the woman further expands on the fact that the Great Whore is not the 'woman of the Lamb', but the 'woman of the Beast'. In view of her previous immoral associations with the kings of the earth, the gendered image here is far from that of a well-respected character in the Apocalypse.

Recurrent commonplaces implied by fellowship with Beast are *power, wealth, and arrogance*. Moral evaluations revolve almost obsessively around *evil, destruction, devastation and persecution*.

The Beast could be personified in its disastrous political power, as suggested by the participial clause. Equally, the woman is personified, concretized in her vileness, possibly alluding constantly to the fact that she deserves the punishment proclaimed in the introductory verses.

As a result, the rhetorical function of the gendered image of the Whore is scrutinized, generally by obfuscating the political aspect.

In this attempt, the literary *topos* of the evil vs. good woman aid in understanding how the Great Whore operates at the textual level of the Apocalypse. Barbara Rossing states, "in the Revelation, as in moralists, the linking of the feminine figure with to the Beast

underscores her deadly power and peril.”⁷⁴⁸ However, she contends, “Revelation shifts the image of the woman on the Beast in a much more political direction than moralists.”⁷⁴⁹

Since the introduction of this interpretive path will be concretized mostly in the following verse, I am ready to accept that the designation of ‘woman’ implies much more than the generic biological concept. I extend the implications beyond the mere contrastive scheme of literary substance, into the contemporary readers’ understanding of the metaphor as shaping their lives and existence.

⁷⁴⁸ Rossing, *The Choice*, 81. Also cf. Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 935.

⁷⁴⁹ Rossing, *The Choice*, 81.

4. Dress and Ornaments

a καὶ ἡ γυνὴ ἣν περιβεβλημένη πορφυροῦν καὶ κόκκινον,
b καὶ κεχρυσωμένη χρυσίῳ καὶ λίθῳ τιμίῳ καὶ μαργαρίταις,
c' ἔχουσα ποτήριον χρυσοῦν ἐν τῇ χειρὶ αὐτῆς
c'' γέμον βδελυγμάτων καὶ τὰ ἀκάθαρτα τῆς πορνείας αὐτῆς,

(And the woman has been clothed with purple and scarlet and has been adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls. Holding a golden cup in her hand, full with abominations and with the impurities of her prostitution)

4.1 Preliminary Considerations

The Whore is referred to, for the second time, with the now articulated noun “woman” denoting the fact that John is consistent in what he reports.

After her posture and her despicable ‘throne’, the woman’s meretricious appearance notes the following details: colourful dress and ornaments. She is arrayed in scarlet and purple – περιβεβλημένη πορφυροῦν καὶ κόκκινον in 17:4a and is adorned with gold, [every kind of] precious stone and pearls – κεχρυσωμένη χρυσίῳ καὶ λίθῳ τιμίῳ καὶ μαργαρίταις in 17:4b. The connection of the items mentioned in this verse with the other verses carries a triple significance.

First, it denotes *beauty*, or more exactly seductive beauty, when considering the ethical implications providing the link with the previous subunit (vv. 1-2), even John declares himself amazed (v.6b).

Secondly, the enumeration above denotes *status* –the quality of her clothing, as well as multitude of ornaments would show she is not any street whore.

Thirdly, *economic prosperity* is envisaged, as all of the items mentioned rank as first class merchandise on the list of items of 18:12.

The elements encountered in the current verse feature in Rev 18:16, with the addition of ‘fine linen’ –βύσσινος to the enumeration. With 18:16, the entity described is a ‘city’ and not a ‘woman’ as in the current verse.

The verbatim phrasing of 17:4 and 18:16 bears two major implications: on the one hand, the repetition creates a unity, as well as continuity between two dimensions of the Great Whore, that of ‘woman’, generic by nature and that of a geopolitical entity, i.e. ‘city’. On

the other hand, this refers anaphorically to juxtaposition between ‘city’ and ‘woman’ already accomplished in 17:5.18.

In virtue of the enumerated elements in the portraiture, the woman appears as symbol that allures, tempts and seduces.⁷⁵⁰

She is described by an enumeration of two perfect participles (περιβεβλημένη, κεχρυσωμένη), as well as a present participle (ἔχουσα).

This description functions to “forge an intratextual link with the woman (bride) in 21:2, whose appearance is described in a similar way with perfect particle forms, forming a clear contrast (ἡτοιμασμένην, κεκοσμημένην) to 17:4-5.”⁷⁵¹

Verse 4 contains two descriptions: the luxury items of first part of the description (v.4a.b c’) contrast very much with the content of the golden cup held by the Whore in her hand (v.4 c’’).

Subsequently, the content of the cup bears a strong ethical aspect. So, it relates with the vv. 1-2 via πόρν- cognates.

Moreover, the content of the cup filled with the impurities of her fornication –ποτήριον [...] γέμον βδελυγμάτων καὶ τὰ ἀκάθαρτα τῆς πορνείας αὐτῆς has an inebriating effect on the inhabitants of the earth –ἐμεθύσθησαν οἱ κατοικοῦντες τὴν γῆν ἐκ τοῦ οἴνου τῆς πορνείας αὐτῆς.

In addition, the image of v.4 c’’ anticipates a scene where the cup is used as punishment for the Whore herself in the following lines (vv.5.6) and contours more clearly in chapter 18. The enumeration of elements evoking a negative association will be continued in verses 5-6 of this subunit, with the name she has on her forehead (v.5), as well as with her state of the Whore’s mind (v. 6).

And the woman has been clothed

The second characteristic of the woman, namely her attire is mentioned.

In the following, I will present the importance of the woman being ‘clothed’.

In the Bible, clothes offer nonverbal communication on socio-economic status (priests, kings, wealthy men etc.) as well as moral values (prostitutes, virgins etc.). Whenever any

⁷⁵⁰ Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, 426.

⁷⁵¹ Mathewson, *Verbal Aspects*, 151.

attire is referred, it usually carries an important narrative role, being only rarely mentioned.⁷⁵²

Excursus on various attires in the Apocalypse. Implications

As opposed to characters that are naked, Apocalypse features some dressed *dramatis personae*, whose clothes feature as complementary to their description. This aspect points most certainly to a pattern of clothing imagery in the book.

In the Apocalypse, both the verb περιβάλλω and ἐνδύω designate the same idea of being “clothed”, “dressed” and “robed”.

The second variant is used in 15:6 in connection with the apparel of the seven angels. In 19:14, they refer to clothes of the armies of heaven. The former variant features more often with 3:18, 19:18, 3:5 being frequently used as a participle perfect form in 4:4, 7:9.13, 12:1, 17:4, 18:16 and 19:13.

Additionally, garments are ‘given’ –ἐδόθη (6.11, 19:8) so that characters be ‘prepared’ – ἡτοιμασμένη (19:8, 21:2).

Besides her posture from the previous verse, the Whore is referred as περιβεβλημένη, situating the Whore in the larger context of characters dressed in the Apocalypse.

In the table below I have summed up a series of recurrences of these verbal forms, the the type of apocalyptic character, as well as clothing mentioned.

Table 3

Textual Referent	Type of Clothing
Son of man (1:13-16)	Long robe; golden sash across his chest; seven stars in his hand
Inhabitants of Sardis (3:4.5)	Unsoiled clothes; dressed in white (worthy)
Inhabitants of Laodicea (3:17.18)	Naked; need to be clothed in white
Twenty-four elders (4:4.10)	White robes; golden crowns
The souls of the persecuted (6:11)	White robes
Great multitude (7:9.13)	White robes; palm branches in their hands
Angel (10:1)	clothed with a cloud

⁷⁵² Cf. Heather A. McKay, ‘Gendering the body: Clothes maketh the (wo)man’, in: Robert Hannaford, J’annine Jobling (eds.), *Theology and the Body; Gender, Text and Ideology*, Exeter: Gracewing, 1999, 84-104, 84, 93.

Woman (12:1)	Clothed with Sun; Moon under her feet; crown of twelve stars
Seven angels (15:6)	Pure bright linen; golden sashes
Anonymous (16:15)	Clothed, not naked
Woman (17:4)	Dressed in purple and scarlet; adorned with gold, precious stones, and pearls
Great City (18:16)	Clothed in fine linen, purple and scarlet
Bride (19:8)	Dressed in fine linen, bright and pure; the fine linen is the deeds of the righteous
Word of God	Robe dipped in blood
Armies of Heaven (19:13.14)	wearing fine linen, white and pure
Bride of the Lamb/ Holy City (21:2.9-22)	Adorned with all sorts of precious stones
Anonymous (22:14, cf. 7:14)	Washed robes

Before dealing with the implications of the different types of clothing mentioned previously, I would like to note several observations, as per the synoptic comparison in the table above.

First, both individual, as well as collective characters are clothed in the Apocalypse.

These are heavenly (1:13, 4:4, 6:11, 7:9.13, 10:1, 12:1, 15:5, 19:7.13.14, 22:14) and terrestrial (3:4.17, 16:15, 17:4, 18:16), both masculine⁷⁵³ and feminine.⁷⁵⁴

Second, certain commonplaces feature in their manner of dressing.

These *topoi* include references to colour –white (λευκός in 1:4, 3:5.18, 4:4, 6:11, 7:9.13, cf. 19:13), purple and scarlet (πορφυροῦς καὶ κόκκινος in 17:4, 18:16), texture –fine linen (βύσσινος in 18:16, 19:8.14, or λίνον as in 15:6). Colour and texture are sometimes accompanied by visual bling, such as golden crowns (στέφανος in 4:4.10, cf. 12:1), golden sashes (ζώνη as in 1:13, 15:6), jewels (λίθοι τίμιοι as in 17:4, 18:16, cf. 21:19), gold (χρυσίον as in 17:4, 18:16), pearls (μαργαρίται, 17:4, 18:16 cf. 21:21). Descriptions can also

⁷⁵³ Due to the occasional occurrences of collective denominations, I would not like to consider the characters mentioned solely masculine, or solely feminine. One option would be to clearly make that distinction, between masculine, feminine and collective, or, as Schüssler-Fiorenza suggests, in case of collective entities, the feminine is included in the masculine, for “grammatically masculine language can function both as gender-specific, and as generic language” (Schüssler-Fiorenza, *Vision of Just World*, 15).

⁷⁵⁴ Generally, as presented earlier, most scholarship identifies four major feminine characters in the Apocalypse: Jezebel, the Woman Clothed with the sun, the Great Whore, the Bride of the Lamb. However, Steven Friesen, adds to them, “Ge (γῆ) (‘Earth, Land’) [...] a well-known figure from Greek mythology [...] appearing in Rev 12 as a positive character, who acts on her own to protect the Woman Clothed by the Sun.” (Friesen, *Imperial Cults and the Apocalypse of John*, 186). The same observation is also found with David L. Barr’s article ‘Jezebel’s Skinny Legs. (De)Constructing the Four Queens of the Apocalypse’, available at <http://www.wright.edu/~david.barr/jezebel.htm> (no pagination), (last accessed 15 March 2009).

feature celestial bodies, such as stars (ἀστήρ as in 12:1, cf. 1:16), cloud (νεφέλη as in 10:1) or even the Sun –ἥλιος and the Moon –σελήνη (12:1).

Thirdly, records above serve to dichotomize the good and the bad characters.

As a result, God's allies⁷⁵⁵ tend toward clothes in the colour white, sometimes pure bright – καθαρὸν λαμπρὸν as in 15:6, 19:8, usually of fine texture.

Their clothes or mantles are consequently unsoiled and washed. Good characters are given garments dipped in blood – (ἱμάτιον) βεβαμμένον αἵματι. Their adornment is of the finest nature: golden crowns, jewels, but also stars, Sun and Moon.

Good characters stand in contrast with bad characters that are naked and need to be clothed. The bad wear fabrics in different colours, other than white, such as purple and scarlet.

However, what is intriguing is that although gaudy, bad characters 'imitate' the type of clothing of the righteous.

Sometimes they also wear gold, precious stones and fine linen. A close insight into the context illuminates further on their function in the Apocalypse.

Implications: As shown above, within the Apocalypse, precisely in 16:15, 17:11, cf. 3:18, the idea of "being clothed" contrasts with that of "being naked".

M. E. Vogelzang and W.J. Bakkum interpreted nakedness in a variety of ancient texts such as pieces of literature, hymns, myths, letters, and documents dealing with bureaucratic, as well as legal matters.⁷⁵⁶

Because garments were expensive, they were markers of the wearer's well-being and implicitly, social status.

In contrast, nudity implied the lowest level of the social scale.⁷⁵⁷

Similarly, with regard to the nudity ascribed to a whore –just like in this textual reference – Kelly Olson remarks that "nudity was the marker of the lowest whore, a woman who was said to be ready for every kind of lust."⁷⁵⁸

⁷⁵⁵ Cf. Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, 429; Prigent, *Commentary on the Apocalypse of St. John*, 487.

⁷⁵⁶ For details cf. the article by M. E. Vogelzang, W. J. Bakkum, Meaning and Symbolism of Clothing in Ancient Near Eastern Texts, in: H.L.J. Vanstiphout et al. (eds.), *Scripta Signa Vocis. Studies about Scripts, Scriptures and Scribes and Languages in the Near East, Presented to J. H. Hespers by His Pupils, Colleagues and Friends*, Groningen: Egbert Forsten, 1986, 265-284, 266.

⁷⁵⁷ H. O. Maier, s.v. Kleidung II (Bedeutung), in: Theodor Klauser et al., *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum* (vol. 21), Stuttgart: Hiersemann, 2005, 1-60, 26-27.

⁷⁵⁸ Kelly Olson, Matrona and Whore: Clothing and Definition in Roman Antiquity, in: Christopher A. Faraone and Laura K. McClure (eds.), *Prostitutes and Courtesans in Ancient World*, 186-207, 195.

Becoming naked is conjoined with divine punishment implied by the verb ἡρημωμένην (17:16). This castigatory method can have multiple meanings, given by the context in which it appears. In Rev 17, it refers to the punishment 'in the flesh' applied to the Great Whore. With 17:16, clothes are only a transient wrapping. The Whore's real character is revealed only when the expensive clothes are removed (ἡρημωμένην).

Except for the above mentioned attribute, and in search for establishing an intertextual connection pointing to a tradition, Sals⁷⁵⁹ identifies in OT other contexts, where nakedness functions as a consequence of a divine castigation. Thus, nakedness could express the military defeat or a peoples' captivity such as in Job 12:17.19, 2 Chr 28:15, Deut 28:48. The verb is discussion also connotes with the metaphor of depletion of a geographical territory, with the political and administrative entity's being 'laid waste', common with some references in prophetic literature as in Jer 4:7, 51:26.29.43, Ezek 26:19, 38:12. This valence was discussed in the previous section.

Additionally, a very relevant OT context is that represented by the 'marriage metaphor', more precisely describing the relationship between Yahweh and the chosen people with the aid of sexual metaphors. Becoming naked is a repudiation method following adultery that is amply exemplified by Hos 2:3.5.9, Ezek 16:8.37.39, 23:9.26.29, Nah 3:5, Lam 1:8, Micah 1:11.

However, the 'marriage metaphor' does not apply to the description of the Great Whore. In the Whore's case, the barring will be effected by the Beast on which she sits (17:3) and the kings with whom she fornicated (17:2) and not directly by God. As it was previously mentioned, some postmodern interpreters see in the act of 17:16, a violent sexual crime, a rape.⁷⁶⁰ This interpretation of the adjective 'naked' is not, in my opinion supported textually.

On another level, nakedness is used in a negative manner. It alludes to human creatureliness and the exclusion by God (Gen 2:25, 3:7, Job 1:21, Qoh 5:15), whereas receiving clothes from God (Gen 3:7) would be interpreted positively, i.e. God offering protection.⁷⁶¹

⁷⁵⁹ Sals, *Die Biographie*, 106.

⁷⁶⁰ Pippin, *Eros and the End*, 193; eadem, *Death and Desire*, 57. Cf. Selvidge, *Reflections on Violence and Pornography*, 280f.

⁷⁶¹ Sals, *Die Biographie*, 106.

Another dimension of this protection offered by God is encountered in the act of divine redemption, exemplified in the Apocalypse. Garments could be understood in connection with salvation (6:11, 7:9.13-14, cf. Matt 22:11-12), to which an evaluation of moral categories is frequently attached.

This association is also confirmed with Isa 61:10, which mentions God's clothing with the garments of salvation –ἱμάτιον σωτηρίου, the robe of righteousness –χιτῶνα εὐφροσύνης. Additionally, one could add that at least in the Apocalypse, a character's morality, or lack of it is revealed also by means of clothing.

This particular assumption is supported by a vast reference to the OT literature, where the wicked, enemies of God are clothed in vices, shame, dishonour (Job 8:22, Psalm 132:18, 109:18.29), as opposed to those clothed in salvation and joy in Job 29:14, Psalm 132:9.16.

In the case of the Great Whore described in the vision of Apocalypse 17, her clothing and immorality attach to a category of interest for the feminist study, namely gender.

We are subsequently dealing with a gendered appearance –a woman –in 17:3b.4a.

The larger context in which the gendered metaphor of the Great Whore operates is provided by the immorality (πόρνη) on the one hand and her generic character (γυνή), on the other hand.

It is my contention that the Seer utilizes the gendered image in a rhetorical manner, aiming to personalize Evil very concretely, by giving it a woman's face.

Irrespective of how we, as readers rapport ourselves to the image, respectively interpreted in continuation to the OT traditions enumerated above, or by absolutizing gender, one cannot overlook the generic character of the Great Whore.

Summary

Mentions of clothing in the Apocalypse carry always an important meaning. With apocalyptic characters they represent a type of non-verbal communication used to assess the characters' socio-economic status, as well as delineate characters in terms of morality (or lack of it).

In the excursus above, a pattern was identified, according to which clothed characters are evaluated. The tabular presentation highlighted the criteria according to which the assessment was pursued. Colours, texture, accessories ranging from gold, pearls to celestial bodies differentiate the 'good' from the 'bad'.

While exploring the dialectic clothed-naked, the meaning of ἡρημωμένην pointed to a castigatory method. It carried two important aspects: one associated with the punishment in the flesh and the other bearing political undertones, conjoining with the devastation of lands and territories, because of sieges. Both aspects feature in the presentation of the Great Whore. However, the second aspect gained more prominence, being amply documented by OT prophetic texts and associated with the marriage metaphor that does not apply to the Great Whore.

A third dimension of the same verb included its evaluation in terms of a sexual crime, which is unfortunately not supported textually.

Nakedness associates semantically with losing one's divine protection, for garments stand in relation with the act of divine redemption. In this manner, in the Apocalypse, clothing is used as some sort of moral scale.

This is not problematic per se, though it becomes so, when gender also attaches to this evaluation. In this manner, the condemnation of the Great Whore gains substance for gender-informed claims. A hermeneutics of suspicion can concretize in formulating a critical standpoint concerning the rhetorical (and stereotypical) means to depict evil.

With purple and scarlet

As mentioned above, throughout the Apocalypse,⁷⁶² colours and visual appearance are used to circumscribe a figure's moral character.⁷⁶³ This is not an exception.

Colours bear most certainly a symbolic value, which extends far beyond their actual aesthetic value⁷⁶⁴ and denote wealth and luxury.

Just like *white*, scarlet and purple refer both to the colour, as well as designate the fabrics dyed in these colours.

Just like in the case of clothes, colours also bear ethical implications.

*White*⁷⁶⁵ has ascetic⁷⁶⁶ valences. It is evaluated positively and preferred throughout the Apocalypse (cf. 3:4f. 18).⁷⁶⁷

⁷⁶² So is the case with the horsemen, the beasts, the women of 12 and 19, the 14.000 virgins etc.

⁷⁶³ Huber, *Like a Bride Adorned*, 155.

⁷⁶⁴ Ugo Vanni, *Il Simbolismo nell' Apocalisse*, in: *Gregorianum* 61/1980, 461-506, 485.

⁷⁶⁵ Although 'white' is not featured *per se* with the garments of the Great Whore in Apocalypse 17:4, I chose to include it in the main body of the current study because it offers a stark contrast with the gaudy colours of scarlet and purple, also carrying ethical implications.

⁷⁶⁶ Carey, *A Man's Choice*, 154.

⁷⁶⁷ Cf. Table 3.

By contrast, scarlet and purple are diametrically opposed to white. Within the larger chromatic spectre of these colours, the Dragon of 12, as well as the Beast in 17 are listed as enemies of God, various incarnations of Evil.

Additionally, scarlet and purple are robing a woman, identified as the Great Whore. These colours contrast the Great Whore with another gendered character in the Apocalypse, respectively the Bride of the Lamb. This contrast was alluded to on several occasions by now.

In another order of ideas, the hues are distinctive: scarlet represents wealth and magnificence, and purple is the colour of royalty.⁷⁶⁸

The woman is introduced as the whore fornicating with the kings of the earth, though the text does not elaborate on the source of her possessing of these expensive materials. By linking the two pieces of information, one could easily infer either that the expensive arrayal may be either received in return of her sexual favours,⁷⁶⁹ or it is procured by the Whore herself.⁷⁷⁰

Irrespective of the interpretative choice, her clothes purport an unnatural character. The subsequent violent depletion of clothes (17:16) serves to expose the Whore's real self.

Regarding these observations, I would like to point out that such allusions stem from secondary, indirect associations, even if these claims are not textually marked.

In the Apocalypse, the two expensive dyes feature purposefully⁷⁷¹ in the list of first-hand merchandise in 18:12. The colours are also mentioned in the lament of the merchants in the following chapter, respectively 18:16, when the merchants are mourning over the destroyed city: *Alas, alas, the great city, clothed in fine linen, in purple and scarlet, adorned with gold, with jewels, and with pearls!*

Ruiz acknowledges in the latter reference "the extent of the identification that is made between the Prostitute and Babylon and the qualification of her πορνεία as activity which involves and economic dimension as well."⁷⁷²

⁷⁶⁸ Osborne, *Revelation*, 611.

⁷⁶⁹ Vander Stichele, *Re-membling the Whore*, 119. Cf. Sutter Rehman, who also notes the whore's conspicuous lack of payment, she purportedly received from the groups with whom she interfered (Sutter Rehman, *Die Offenbarung Johannes*, 735).

⁷⁷⁰ Kowalski, *Die Rezeption des Propheten Ezechiel*, 181.

⁷⁷¹ Yarbrow Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis*, 153.

⁷⁷² Ruiz, *Ezekiel in the Apocalypse*, 325; cf. Osborne, *Revelation*, 611, Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 854.

I do acknowledge that this aspect is extremely important for the unity, or continuity between the two other dimensions of the Great Whore, namely the corporeal one and the geopolitical one.

However, this unity is constituted textually at a later point than 17:4. I would like to point out the divergence with historical approaches that disconsider the appropriate textual order of the two dimensions listed above and perceive the garments of the Whore in purely economic terms, associated to the description of a city. They also disregard their importance for delineating the Great Whore's character.

My interest is thus of a different nature: everything denoting the appearance of the Whore is constructed primarily as belonging to the conceptual domain of a woman. Without this corporeal dimension of clothing and adornment, the reader/interpreter cannot adequately grasp the rich implications of the gendered image in Rev 17.

It is for this reason, that the feminist analysis I am pursuing will engross the generic implications of both clothes and adornments.

The first of the two hues mentioned is scarlet –κόκκινος.

It is a special colour, mentioned frequently in the OT. As such, scarlet associates with other expensive item such as *gold* (Jer 4:30, 2 Sam 1:24 and Prov 31:21) and *purple* in the OT, when referring to the priest's clothes⁷⁷³ (Exod 24:5, 28:5, 31:4, 35:6, 35:25, 39:12). I will show in the following how all these items feature in the Whore's attire.

Everything about this colour points to its nobility, to its dignity, to luxury and wealth.

The latter reference is associated with the subsequent geopolitical identification of the Great Whore with Babylon in 18:14.17.19.

Moreover, Babylon is reported to live luxuriously, experiencing full enjoyment of senses implied by the verb σπρννιάω –repeated three times in 18:3.7.9, as a justification for the divine punishment.

Self-glorification (18:7) –ἐδόξασεν αὐτήν –is also brought in connection with wearing 'scarlet', thus inviting a negative interpretation as 'arrogance'. The reader is thus constantly reminded that, that there is something wrong with this picture.

The closest textual association of scarlet is underscored with the description of Beast from the previous verse. The posture of the woman dressed in scarlet, seated on a scarlet beast, alludes to the identical nature of the two, manifested in two attributes: *evilness* and *arrogance*. The Whore is in this way placed on the side of God's enemies.

⁷⁷³ Lupieri, *A Commentary on the Apocalypse of John*, 257.

Moreover, scarlet was attributed an apotropaic effect (Gen 38:28, Jos 2:18) in the cleansing rituals (Lev 14:4.6.49.51, Num 4:8, 19:6, Heb 9:19). Cf. Sals, *Die Biographie*, 102.

Just like the beast, the whore-woman *purports unjustly possible pretensions*⁷⁷⁴ of authority, indicated by the colour scarlet, although she is essentially a whore. The putting-her-into-place will be represented among others by the loss of the resplendent dress in 17:16 (cf. 18:6-8).

Considering the moral undertones of scarlet, these provide another anchor-point in perceiving the whore as the *doublet of the beast*. It also implies the *persecuting nature*⁷⁷⁵ of both (the beasts in Rev 13 and the woman in 17:6, 18:24 and 19:2).⁷⁷⁶

The resplendent garments include yet another expensive dye, i.e. *purple* – πορφύρα.

The hues covered by πορφύρα range from red to dark purple.⁷⁷⁷ In this particular context, it functions as a nominalized adjective – πορφυροῦς.⁷⁷⁸

As previously described, the colour denotes a high economical status, as with Alexander the Great, purple became a worldwide currency as status symbol.⁷⁷⁹

The higher status brought about royal associations as per Judg 8:26, Est 8:15, Lam 4:5, Dan 5:7.16.29, 1 Macc 10:20.62.64, 11:58, 14:43, Sir 40:4, Mark 15:17, John 19:2, Gospel of Peter 3.7.⁷⁸⁰

From the enumeration above, I would like to underscore the fact that the royal association 'purple' has, is validated in the mocking scene of the crucifixion (Mark 15:17, par. Matt 27:27-30, John 19:2). Here, purple clothing refers to Roman insignia of royalty.⁷⁸¹

⁷⁷⁴ Blount, *Revelation*, 314.

⁷⁷⁵ Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 855; Osborne, *Revelation*, 610 (ft. 7).

⁷⁷⁶ While keeping the carnal character of the image before our eyes, the whore will be subsequently presented as inebriated with "blood of the martyrs" in 17:6, the motif being taken up again in 19:2, when God is praised for avenging the blood of his servants on her. Similarly, in the political dimension of the whore, respectively in 18:24, in Babylon was found the blood of prophets and of saints, and of all who have been slaughtered on earth.

⁷⁷⁷ Frederick W. Danker, art. 'Purple', in: *ABD* (vol.5), New York: Doubleday, 1992, 557-560, 557. Cf. Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 934-935.

⁷⁷⁸ Besides this option, he notes three other textual variants in manuscripts, namely πορφύρας, πορφύραν, πορφύρον. Cf. the respective locations per Aune's mention in Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 909; Cf. Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, 430.

⁷⁷⁹ Meyer Reinhold, *History of Purple as a Status Symbol in Antiquity* (Collection Latomus 116), Bruxelles: Latomus, 1970, 28, also 71, 72. The Greek word 'πορφύρα', which refers to purple and the purple fish, a species of shell fish or mussel from which the dye colour is derived. This species was relatively rare and thus the purple dye was quite valuable. Cf. John M. Court, *Myth and History in the Book of Revelation*, Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1979, 147.

⁷⁸⁰ Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 854; Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 935. Cf. Blount, *Revelation*, 314.

⁷⁸¹ Swete, *Commentary on Revelation*, 212; Prigent, *Commentary on the Apocalypse of St. John*, 487 (ft. 9). Cf. Kowalski, *Die Rezeption des Propheten Ezechiel*, 181.

In virtue of the previously mentioned, namely of purple featuring as royal colour, I would like to elaborate on the implications for the current verse. Subsequently, the close connection between 'purple' and 'royalty' on the one hand, and 'purple' and 'whore', on the other hand is established in two aspects.

Firstly, purple indicates the Whore dressed in queenly attire. This fact is confirmed in the subsequent chapter by the whore's self-perception as queen –βασιλίσσα (18:7). Also, the same is reported by the angel: the Whore exerts power over the kings of the earth (17:18). However, her royal status is mere "idle self-glorification". "The Greek word for 'queen' βασιλίσσα connotes a female ruler with authority over her domain. Yet, according to common practices in Israel and Judah, the king's favourite wife was not given a special title or position" implying that "the identification of Babylon as queen drastically portrays her own self-glorification as goddess"⁷⁸² that is denounced by Jeremiah in Jer 7:18. Additionally, she is never acclaimed as queen in unanimity, but from the textual information retrieved from the same chapter, she is 'worshipped' by an exclusive group of people, respectively the powerful on earth (18:23) –οἱ μεγιστᾶνες τῆς γῆς.⁷⁸³

Secondly, should we take into account the previous denominations concerning the occupation of the main character depicted in chapter 17-18, one could see, how awkward her pretense was. Two questions can be formulated: how can a whore be a queen and how can a respectable queen be perceived as a whore?

This mention could be therefore an example of the apocalypticist's irony.

As whore, "wearing royal colours such as red or purple would most certainly look ridiculous on someone who was not of imperial status", considering that „an honorable status (could have) been either inherited or earned.”⁷⁸⁴

Just like scarlet, purple also had cultic associations. Kowalski places this colour in a dialogical textual relationship with the Book of Baruch,⁷⁸⁵ in the larger context of idol worshipping delineated in chapter 6.

With the Book of Baruch, purple features in the description of the Babylonian gods: they are covered with a purple garment (v. 12), as well as gold, silver, stone, wood (v.3) feature. Although made of gold and silver, Babylonian gods cannot speak (v.7), are false, they will rust and be subsequently eaten by moths (v.11).

⁷⁸² Räßle, *The Metaphor of the City*, 77.

⁷⁸³ Räßle, *The Metaphor of the City*, 76.

⁷⁸⁴ Alicia J. Batten, Clothing and Adornment in: *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 40/210, 148-159, 149-150.

⁷⁸⁵ Kowalski, *Die Rezeption des Propheten Ezechiel*, 181.

Especially if read in tandem with 17:16. I consider the above mentioned as fitting extremely well, to what has been so far written on the character of the Whore.

Summary

By evidencing the various implications of scarlet and purple, the textual puzzle concerning the appearance of the Whore amasses more clarifying elements.

Besides the luxurious, moral, cultic evaluations retrieved from the intratextual links with the Beast, or the intertextual traditions of contemporary ancient writings, some commentators⁷⁸⁶ argue that these colours contribute to the Whore's desirability.⁷⁸⁷

When analyzed intratextually with the following enumeration of her adornments, respectively "adorned in gold and precious stones and pearls", the collection of items establish a contrast with the Whore's wickedness, inferred from the content of the cup she holds in her hand.

And has been adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls

Gold, precious stones as well as pearls complete the woman's resplendent ensemble.

The second part of v.4 is construed analogically with 4a as shown below:

4(a καὶ ἡ γυνὴ ἣν περιβεβλημένη πορφυροῦν καὶ κόκκινον,)

4b καὶ (κεχρυσωμένη) χρυσίῳ

καὶ (κεχρυσωμένη) λίθῳ τιμίῳ

καὶ (κεχρυσωμένη) μαργαρίταις

Just like in the previous part, the conjunction καὶ marks the beginning of new informational block.

Omitting the subject woman, inferred from perfect participle in the third person singular feminine, *κεχρυσωμένη* is accompanied by three objects – χρυσίῳ καὶ λίθῳ τιμίῳ

⁷⁸⁶ Carey, *A Man's Choice*, 154; cf. Pippin, *Death and Desire*, 65-68. Also cf. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 854; Blount, *Revelation*, 314.

⁷⁸⁷ However, this desirability is differently understood, ranging from an economical desirability to a sexual one. This will be presented with the analysis of the verb θαυμάζω in v.6. Blount names this desirability a "mating maneuver" (Blount, *Revelation*, 314).

καὶ μαργαρίταις. Both precious stones and pearls depend upon this participle by a *zeugma*.⁷⁸⁸

Similarly, the construction features in 18:16 with the lament of the merchants regarding the fall of the Great City.

In this instance, however, the above mentioned items are evaluated negatively, since they point to wealth and seductive nature.⁷⁸⁹

As such, women's heavy bejewelment is usually enumerated in the lists of the forbidden items in the NT, along with hair braids, with gold, pearls, or expensive clothes (1 Ti 2:9).⁷⁹⁰

Similarly, 1 Pet 3:3 opposes external adornment, i.e. hair braids, gold ornaments, fine clothing to internal adornment, namely the lasting beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit that is precious to God's sight.

The participle forms with the first item enumerated, i.e. 'gold' a pleonastic construction.⁷⁹¹

The elements of this construction are derived from the same stem that could be translated literally 'gilded with gold'.⁷⁹²

The translation I favour for this verse is 'adorned', for it suggests abundance. It is also important to note that the verbal stem of the participle χρυσόω and the repetition of a cognate (χρυσίον) allude most certainly to the clearer visualization of the idea of abundance⁷⁹³ –*inaurata auro*.

Such a construction occurs on several occasions in OT, where it is usually translated as 'overlaid with gold'.

In Exod 25:11.13, 26:37⁷⁹⁴ it features with the indications for the construction of the tabernacle.

Additionally, the construction is mentioned in 2 Chr 3: 4.7.8.10 and as well as with the description of King Solomon's throne in 2 Chr 9:17 (cf. 1 Kgs 10:18).

Gold –χρυσίον is mentioned twice in 17:4b, it denotes the vestment of the Whore, while in v. 4c' it describes adjectively (χρυσοῦς) the golden cup that the woman holds in her hand.

⁷⁸⁸ Swete, *Commentary on Revelation*, 216, cf. Charles, *Revelation* 2:64. In case of a *zeugma*, the readers supply mentally the participle for each of the subsequent clause introduced by καί. Such other examples are found in Rev 21:2.9.

⁷⁸⁹ Murphy, *Fallen is Babylon*, 355, Swete, *Commentary on Revelation*, 216; Prigent, *Commentary on the Apocalypse of St. John*, 488: cf. Blount, *Revelation*, 314.

⁷⁹⁰ Sals, *Die Biographie*, 99.

⁷⁹¹ Pezzoli-Olgati, *Täuschung und Klarheit*, 146; cf. Smalley, *Revelation to John*, 430.

⁷⁹² Prigent, *Commentary on the Apocalypse of St. John*, 488 (ft. 12). Smalley, *Revelation to John*, 430. Charles opts for 'covered' (Charles, *Revelation* 2:64).

⁷⁹³ Rissi, *Die Verführung*, 51. However, the same idea of abundance is evident with the presentation of the Whore's contrastive gendered character, respectively, the Bride of the Lamb (Sals, *Die Biographie*, 99).

⁷⁹⁴ Swete, *Commentary on Revelation*, 216.

Throughout the Apocalypse, 'gold' is ascribed to the divine sphere (1:12.13.20, 2:1, 3:18, 4:4, 5:8, 8:3, 9:7.13, 14:14, 15:6.7, 21:15.18.21)⁷⁹⁵ but is also employed in connection with those opposed to God (9:7, 17:4, and 18:12.16).

With those allied to God, 'gold' features with the apparel of the Son of Man (14:4), the crowns of the elders (4:4), the seven lampstands (1.12.20), the seven bowls (5:8. 15:7), the sashes of the seven angels (15:6), the measuring rod (21:15), as well as the altar and the thurible (8:3). The city of the New Jerusalem (21:18) and its streets (21:21) are pure gold – χρυσίον καθαρόν.

Given the diversity of occurrences, Sals establishes the criterion of *quality*. When associated with the cultic use in 21:18.21 (cf. Exod 25:11 ff.), 'gold' would be evaluated positively, whereas in 17:4, 18:12.16 would trigger a negative connotation.⁷⁹⁶

Not only that the Great Whore is heavily adorned with gold, she is also bejeweled.

Jewels (λίθοι τίμιοι) are used in a singular form having a collective meaning.⁷⁹⁷ It could be therefore translated either as 'precious stones', or as 'every kind of'⁷⁹⁸ precious stone'.

In the OT for example, jewels are mentioned among the presents the queen of Sheba brings to Solomon (1 Kgs 10:2.10.11, cf. 2 Chr 9:1.9.10), as well as among the riches adequate for the house of the Lord in 1 Chr 29:12.

Jewels also adorn the crown David receives in 2 Sam 12:30 (cf. Psalm 21:4).

Ezek 28:13 could be understood as offering a possible list of what we ought to understand under the concept of every precious stone –πᾶν λίθον χρηστόν. When speaking about the king of Tyre, precious stones (also cf. 27:22) like ruby, topaz, diamond, beryl, onyx, jasper, lapis lazuli, turquoise, emerald and gold are enumerated.⁷⁹⁹

Jewels maintain their collective meaning throughout the Apocalypse. As such, they are mentioned for the first time in Rev 4:3 in the description of the heavenly throne room and listed as carnelian (σάρδιον), jasper (ἵασπις) and emerald (σμαράγδιος).

Jewels also feature in the description of New Jerusalem (21:19-20), where they adorn the foundations of the city wall –οἱ θεμέλιοι τοῦ τείχους τῆς πόλεως παντὶ λίθῳ τιμίῳ

⁷⁹⁵ Ruiz, *Ezekiel in the Apocalypse*, 435.

⁷⁹⁶ Sals, *Die Biographie*, 99. Contra Massyngberde Ford's observation that throughout the Apocalypse, the usage of gold degrades: in the first part of the Apocalypse, it is associated with heavenly matters (4:3-4, 5:8, 8:3, 9:7.13), in 9:20, idols are made of "gold and silver", having as the epitome of degradation, the ornaments of the Great Whore. The reason for Massyngberde Ford's rejection is justified by the positive interpretation of 'gold' in the description of the new city of Jerusalem, which features towards the end of the Apocalypse. (Massyngberde Ford, *Revelation*, 288).

⁷⁹⁷ Swete, *Commentary on Revelation* 213, Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 909.

⁷⁹⁸ This is the translation featured with Prigent, *Commentary on the Apocalypse of St. John*, 488 (ft. 12); Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 909, 970f; Swete, *Commentary on Revelation*, 216.

⁷⁹⁹ Kowalski, *Die Rezeption des Propheten Ezechiel*, 181.

κεκοσμημένοι –listed in order of appearance as jasper, sapphire, agate, emerald (v.19), onyx, carnelian, chrysolite, beryl topaz, chrysoprase, jacinth, amethyst (v.20).

Precious gems are also referenced as first-hand merchandise in 18:12, just like gold, scarlet, purple. Their negative connotation is evident with the portrayal of the Great Whore. Here, as well as in 18:16, jewels designate the ostentatious display of the Whore.

The precious stones of chapter 17 are used in the superlative degree in 21:11: λίθοι τίμιοι become λίθοι τιμώτατοι. The New Jerusalem coming down from heaven resembled a most precious stone (21:11), thus signalling the superiority of the latter over the former. This observation adds to the similar evaluation of gold (17:4, cf. 21:8) and is also evident with the fine linen featured in the description of the Bride in 19:8 (cf. 18:12).

Through this technique often alluded to in the contrastive pairs analyzed so far points to the consistent manner in which the text of the Apocalypse conveys its message. By the negative associations adduced by the Whore's adornment, the evaluative perspective permeates the negativity of the image throughout the Apocalypse.

Although taken in the political dimension, in the contrast between the two cities (Babylon and New Jerusalem), the generic component⁸⁰⁰ plays an important role.

It is evident from what was shown above that jewels circumscribe very well the conceptual domain of wealth, remaining consistent with the other items (scarlet, purple, gold) presented so far. Equally, in 18:19, the related noun 'wealth' –τιμότης features with reference to the extent of Babylon's sea exploits, resulting into a great number of people's amassing fortune – ἐκ τῆς τιμότητος αὐτῆς.

In the latter observation, not only is the Great Whore Babylon displaying wealth, but also the Whore features as source of enrichment for others.

In analyzing the context in which precious stones operate, the leitmotif of these verses, precisely 'luxury' is reiterated. Given the negative implications of non-divinely sourced luxury, one can again notice how false the pretense of sovereignty on behalf of the Whore actually is. Clothes and jewels are characteristic of the evil Whore, who functions in a manner diametrically opposed to God.

Within the same domain of adornment, jewels and pearls feature in the description of the woman in the wilderness.

Μαργαρίται are considered "the most valuable of precious stones in Antiquity",⁸⁰¹ used for the adornment of necklaces, which originate from the Red Sea, the Persian Gulf and the Indian Ocean.

⁸⁰⁰ Sals, *Die Biographie*, 100; cf. Huber, *Like a Bride Adorned*, 171.

The figurative use can be found in the NT, where the kingdom of God resembled to a merchant in search for fine pearls (Matt 13:45).

Nevertheless, with 1Ti 2:9, pearls are used in their denotative sense, being negatively assessed. They imply feminine voluptuousness. As a result, pearls should be avoided at all cost.

In the Apocalypse, pearls play an important role with the description of the New Jerusalem,⁸⁰² which in accordance with the rabbinic descriptions of the eschatological Jerusalem based on Isa 54:12.⁸⁰³

Subsequently, Rev 21:21 mentions the architecture of twelve gates of New Jerusalem, i.e. carved out of an immense pearl: “And the twelve gates are twelve pearls, each of the gates is a single pearl –Καὶ οἱ δώδεκα πυλῶνες, δώδεκα μαργαρίται· ἀνὰ εἷς ἕκαστος τῶν πυλώνων ἦν ἐξ ἐνὸς μαργαρίτου.

Pearls therefore carry *par excellence* a positive connotation.

With the above reference in mind, it is not a surprise that given the context and function of the Great Whore with 17:4 (cf. 18:16), pearls are not evaluated positively.

From the contrast with the description of the New Jerusalem, one can infer the Great Whore’s distasteful imitation of the divine.

Additionally, in accordance with the context depicting the Whore, the current items mentioned “prove the generalized use of a stereotype that was particularly well suited to the intentions of the author of the Revelation” [...] namely “to describe the seduction practiced by a woman of ill repute”.⁸⁰⁴ Two examples are adduced. These do not function intertextually with Apocalypse 17. Nevertheless, they allude, respectively echo in terms of employed themes some of the elements employed in the description of the Great Whore.

The negative vein is consistent with a short sapiential poem from Qumran, Wiles of the Wicked Woman (4Q 184), modeled after several harlotry passages of Proverbs,⁸⁰⁵

⁸⁰¹ Pliny the Elder, *The Natural History*, 9.54, Athenaeus, *Deipnosophists*, 3.93.

Although not mentioned either in Hebrew Bible or LXX, in Judaism, pearls occur most of the time in a plural form, being employed figuratively, standing for a „valuable saying” especially in Job 28:18 (cf. Matt 7:6). Cf. Friedrich Hauck, Margaritēs in: Gerhard Kittel et al. (eds.), *Theological Dictionary of New Testament. Abridged in One Volume*, (abbreviated hereafter as TDNT), Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1985, 564. Also Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 998.

⁸⁰² Kowalski, *Die Rezeption des Propheten Ezechiel*, 180.

⁸⁰³ Prigent, *Commentary on the Apocalypse of St. John*, 621; cf. Swete, *Commentary on Revelation*, 290.

⁸⁰⁴ Prigent, *Commentary on the Apocalypse of St. John*, 488 (ft. 13).

⁸⁰⁵ Rick D. Moore, Personification of the Seduction of Evil: ‘The Wiles of the Wicked Woman’, in: *Revue de Qumran* 10(4)/1981, 505-521, 506; cf. Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 935. The pastiche of harlotry passages from Proverbs enumerates as sources Prov. 2:16-19, 5:3-6, 6:24-35, 7:5-27, 22:14, 23:27-28.

addressing apostasy as one aspect of evil –with the aid of the *topos* of the wicked woman, namely a personification of the seduction of evil.⁸⁰⁶ The poem is especially relevant for the subunit comprising the verses 3-4 in the vision of the Great Whore.

Besides a description of the anatomy of the harlot, of her abode, as well as of the consequences of her wicked wiles, the poem also contains references to her attire and ornaments. Presumably, the whore wore a distinctive dress, as inspired by Prov. 7:10 and in line with Jer 4:30, her decorative ornaments envisage jewelry as tools for sexual manipulation, textually referred to as being “infected with corruption”.⁸⁰⁷

Thus attire and adornment, as well as other physical details and the moral labels of ‘prostitute’ are stock traits⁸⁰⁸ evaluated negatively, as falling for her charms would have disastrous consequences, turning the righteous away from God.⁸⁰⁹

Another reference of interest in terms of commonplaces attributed to women in seducing men may be **The Testament of Judah 13.4-5**, where pearls and gold outline the prostitute’s attire in as employed in the process of seduction.⁸¹⁰ This strategy is surely a successful one, for Judah fell for Bathshua’s charms.

The kings and inhabitants of the earth, in virtue of their association with the Great Whore may very well resemble Judah’s fall. The latter’s inebriation linked with the seducing powers of the Whore’s attire function synergically to serve the purpose of comparison with the Testament of Judah.

Summary

In v. 4, the Seer describes the attire of the woman in the desert vision.

The description of the garments is completed by another plethora of references to ornamentation, which pertains to the woman’s domain.

Garments and adornment reiterate under various forms messages of wealth and luxury.

⁸⁰⁶ Moore, *Personification*, 507.

⁸⁰⁷ Moore, *Personification*, 513, also 507.

⁸⁰⁸ Rossing, *The Choice*, 77.

⁸⁰⁹ Moore, *Personification*, 508.

⁸¹⁰ Harm W. Hollander and Marinus de Jonge, *The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs: a Commentary* (Studia in Veteris Testamenti Pseudepigrapha 8), Leiden: Brill, 1985, 184-232, 203. Bathshua’s father adorned her with the purpose of seducing Judah “through the fashion of adorning”. Also Charles, *Revelation 2*: 64-65, cf. Prigent, *Commentary on the Apocalypse of St. John*, 488 (ft. 13).

Although in their literal sense, every item *per se*, i.e. gold, jewels, pearls has a neutral, sometimes positive value, when analyzed in the immediate context of the Great Whore's presentation, each of the above mentioned item is accompanied by a derisory if not negative interpretation.

The text of the Apocalypse seems inconsistent with the manner in which both clothing and adornment operate. The context is decisive in acknowledging its evaluative dualist perspective.

The particular phrasing in this verse suggests abundance, which if does not have a divine origin,⁸¹¹ bears a negative connotation throughout the Bible (the Apocalypse included). Therefore, in their correct assessment, a criterion concerning quality is imperative.

Rhetorically, the description above aims at creating yet another contrast with the Bride of the Lamb, especially in her political dimension, that of the New Jerusalem. The contrast functions on a rhetorical level in two ways: on the one hand, the simplicity of the Bride/New Jerusalem is opposed the distasteful amassing of colours and objects of the Whore's, on the other hand, the Seer takes the abundance pertaining to the Bride to a superlative state.⁸¹²

The contrast also incorporates another motif, namely that of *imitation*, mentioned by now: when compared to the magnificence of the Divine City, the Whore's display is nothing but a cheap imitation.

It was also shown how the items of interest connoted very well with the standardized description of a voluptuous prostitute, as part of her seduction apparel (cf. the Testament of Judah also the previously alluded references of 1Ti 2:9 and 1 Pet 3:3).

From the above, the context is extremely important for the evaluation of the items pertaining to the visual description of the woman in 17:4.

A lack of consideration of both the immediate ascetic context of the Apocalypse, as well as the secondary associations resulting from the intertexts could change and possibly damage my exegetical assessment of the character of the Great Whore.

⁸¹¹ Considering the decorative items listed as expensive merchandise in 18:12 as goods exploited and traded by Babylon, one can opt without error for a non-divine origin.

⁸¹² With the presentation of the wealth in both cities, Greg contends "whatever Babylon's glory, the New Jerusalem surpasses it by far." (Greg Carey, *The Book of Revelation as Counter-Imperial Script*, in: Richard A. Horsley (ed.), *In the Shadow of the Empire. History of Faithful Resistance*, Louisville: John Knox Press, 2008, 157-176, 170).

In her hand, she had a golden cup

The third participial clause referring to the woman is introduced, but this time by the help of a present participle ἔχουσα.

After completing her portrayal, the focus shifts cinematically to the cup the Whore holds in her hand.

This is where things explicitly worsen. So far, the negative connotations were not explicit. They were only inferred from narrower (intratextual) or larger context (intertextual), by means of comparisons and contrasts.

The choice for the description of the hand, as well as the content of the cup is not at all aleatory. These complete the portrayal of the Great Whore in the same negative vein as it will be evident from the following.

The Bible distinguishes between the literal and the figurative uses of ‘cup’.

It refers to *everyday use* in Mark 9:41, 7:4, whereas in Luke 11:39-40, Matt 23:25-26 it is included in the contrastive gestures of the hypocritical Pharisees.

The figurative uses include mostly metaphorical expressions such as ‘cup of suffering’⁸¹³, or ‘cup of wrath’. The latter of the two formulations above, respectively, ‘cup of wrath’ derives from OT,⁸¹⁴ where it denotes God’s judgment (Psalm 76:8, Isa 51:17), having horrendous attributes (Ezek 23:33, cf. Isa 51:17).

In the Apocalypse, the cup appears four times in a figurative use (14:10, 16:19, 17:4, 18:16).

The image of the cup is not consistent in the Apocalypse. It combines contrastive images of the cup of the *wrath of God* with the cup, containing impurities of the *Whore’s fornication*. When the cup belongs to God, it is designated as the ‘cup of the wine of His fierce wrath’ (16:19) –τὸ ποτήριον τοῦ οἴνου τοῦ θυμοῦ τῆς ὀργῆς αὐτοῦ. God gives drink from ‘the cup of anger’ (14:10) –ἐν τῷ ποτηρίῳ τῆς ὀργῆς to whomever worships the Beast, including the Whore.

In three out of four occurrences (16:19, 17:4, 18:16), the Apocalypse’s *Babylon* is targeted, the image of the cup being used—with the exception of 17:4—as a punitive tool. The wine

⁸¹³ ‘Cup’ as announcing suffering features in John 18:11 as a symbol of martyrdom (cf. *The Martyrdom of Polycarp* 14.2 in: *The Apostolic Fathers*, 307-347, 331-333).
, evidencing Jesus’ accepting the divine fate.

⁸¹⁴ Leonhard Goppelt, art. Potêrion” in: *TDNT*, 844-845, 844.

depicts God's active wrath, and the cup could point to the power of God's wrathful judgment.

As such, the cup image mentioned above retains the essence of the metaphorical use in the OT.

Subsequently, it delineates a metaphor for *divine judgment*⁸¹⁵ that most exegetes envision it as inspired by Jeremiah 51:7.⁸¹⁶ The metaphor of divine judgment applies to Rev 18. As a result, the cup becomes Babylon's sin and will be forced upon her in 18:6. "In the cup which she has mixed, mix twice as much for her" –ἐν τῷ ποτηρίῳ ᾧ ἐκέρασεν κεράσατε αὐτῇ διπλοῦν. Nevertheless, the image in Jer 51:7 differs from the image of the Great Whore holding a cup in 17:4. Here, the not-yet identified Babylon is no longer like a cup in God's hand. Rather, she herself drinks and inebriates others,⁸¹⁷ respectively the inhabitants of the earth, becoming thus responsible for the consequences of her act. These most probably allude to sexual misconduct and intoxication.

The cup she holds is not any type of cup. It is a *golden* one.

Lupieri contends it is not uncommon to describe a beloved and desired object as golden.⁸¹⁸ The golden colour could be viewed either as "an instrument of divine action",⁸¹⁹ or as another object of luxury.⁸²⁰

I consider the latter observation pertinent, for it is in accordance to what has been so far presented.

In line with the luxurious interpretation of golden cup, Kowalski mentions Est 1:7,⁸²¹ that mentions golden cups –ποτήρια χρυσᾶ –in the context of a royal banquet.

To sum up, the cup bears in 17:4, as well as in the verse's immediate context a reference to 'luxury' or 'luxurious living' as well as carries negative connotations derived from its content, with opens up the theme of the divine judgment, via OT intertextual references.

With the golden cup, the items pertaining to the woman reach an end. In the following, the woman will be described by means of physical features as well as biological data.

The hand – χεῖρ is frequently mentioned in the Apocalypse.⁸²²

⁸¹⁵ Charles, *Revelation*, 2:65; Swete, *Commentary on Revelation* 213.

⁸¹⁶ *Babylon was a golden cup in the Lord's hand, making all the earth drunken; the nations drank of her wine, and so the nations went mad* (Jer 51:7).

⁸¹⁷ Zimmermann, *Geschlechtermethaphorik und Gottesverhältnis*, 407, cf. Ruiz, *Ezekiel in the Apocalypse*, 329.

⁸¹⁸ Lupieri, *A Commentary on the Apocalypse of John*, 344.

⁸¹⁹ Lupieri, *A Commentary on the Apocalypse of John*, 257.

⁸²⁰ Swete, *Commentary on Revelation*, 213.

⁸²¹ Kowalski, *Die Rezeption des Propheten Ezechiel*, 182.

As presented earlier, in Table 3, in conjunction with clothes, the ‘hand’ is mentioned with the Son of Man in 1:16 holding seven stars. It also featured in the description of the multitude in 7:9.

Other times, the ‘hand’ occurs with the description of other dramatic characters shortly before they take action. The rider on the black horse is holding scales in his hand in 6:5. Angels are holding a scroll in 10:2.8.10, as well as thurible before worshipping God 8:4 and another angel in 20:1 has the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain.

In addition, the Son of Man makes an appearance in 14:14, holding a sharp sickle in his hand.

Besides these occurrences, a mark on the hand denotes ownership in 13:16 and 14:9 (cf. 20:4), in this case of the worshippers of the Beast.

From the examples above, one can infer that holding an object in the hand implies in a transferred sense ‘power’. This idea is in accordance with some of the usages in NT (cf. Mark 9:31, Luke 1:71, 2 Cor 11:33, John 3:35).⁸²³

Besides the occurrence in 17:4, in one particular intratext in the Apocalypse, the ‘hand’ associates with ‘gold’. This concerns the ones who do not repent of the works of their hands –ἐκ τῶν ἔργων τῶν χειρῶν αὐτῶν 9:20 –as not to “worship demons and idols of gold and of silver and of brass and of stone and of wood, which can neither see nor hear nor walk”. The discourse in question pertains as a result, to the larger context of idol worshipping.

Moreover, idolatry⁸²⁴ is associated with the work of the goldsmith (Jer 10:3-5, Isa 2:7-8, 40:19), with idols of precious metals, featuring with alien and false cults (Deut 7:25, 29:16-18, Hos 2:8, 8:4, Isa 46:1.6-7).

Considering the importance and function of the mentioned *dramatis persona*, in whose case ‘hand’ is mentioned, the woman-whore in the vision makes an important appearance. She may be interpreted as concentrating in her hand some sort of power, possibly about to utilize.

In conclusion, intertextual associations with idolatry introduce a new theme for chapter 17. This will be reiterated by the subsequent presentation regarding the content of the cup.

It is therefore important to mention that by opening this orientation, the woman’s character will also be defined by her mingling with idols, thus reinforcing her status as God’s enemy.

⁸²² Cf. Rev 1:16, 6:15, 7:9, 8:4, 9:20, 10:2.5, 13:16, 14:6.14, 17:4, 19:2, 20:1.4.

⁸²³ E. Lohse, art. *Cheír* in: *TDNT*, 1309-1312, 1311.

⁸²⁴ Elizabeth E. Platt, art. ‘Jewelry, Ancient Israelite’, in: *ABD* (vol.3), 823-834, 824.

Full with abominations and with the impurities of her prostitution

The construction referring to the content of the cup is unique⁸²⁵ in the Bible. So far, we encountered the punitive drink of God made of wine. The woman has her own potion and the angel lists as ingredients ‘abominations and impurities of her fornication’.

The effect of such a drink is not punishment, just like in the case of God’s wine of wrath. If we allow the connection with the subunit 1-2, the Whore’s ‘wine’ has an inebriating effect on the inhabitants of the earth, most probably leading them into idol worship.

This is the second time in this chapter (cf. 17:2) when the combination between sexual misconduct and inebriation features.⁸²⁶

In view of the above, I have therefore identified the secret behind the immense success of the Whore. The Whore’s subduing the groups of inhabitants and kings of the earth is achieved by pursuing despicable acts, by using one’s erotic capital and by drinking abuse. Additionally, by the repetition of the leitmotif πόρνη, respectively ‘her prostitution’ – πορνεία αὐτῆς, the phrasing γέμον βδελυγμάτων καὶ τὰ ἀκάθαρτα τῆς πορνείας αὐτῆς provides an anchor point to the introductory verses of this chapter.

Just as the Beast is full with blasphemous names, so is the Whore’s cup full –γέμον. The construction of γέμειν –to fill’ occurs in this instance, either with genitive of material or content as in 4:6.8, 5:8, 15:7, 17:4, 21:9 (idiomatic in Greek), or with accusative that would be idiomatic in Hebrew,⁸²⁷ coordinated by the conjunction καί.⁸²⁸

Both terms, ‘abomination’ (βδέλυγμα) and ‘unclean things/impurities’ (ἀκάθαρτα) occur together in LXX Job 15:16, as a hendiadys,⁸²⁹ respectively ‘one who is detestable and impure’ –ἐβδελυγμένος καὶ ἀκάθαρτος.

The content of the cup contrasts with the external beauty and wealth, in the same manner Matt 23:25 does,⁸³⁰ respectively with Jesus’ address to the Pharisees. Jesus contrasts the

⁸²⁵ Kowalski, *Die Rezeption des Propheten Ezechiel*, 182.

⁸²⁶ Ruiz, *Ezekiel in the Apocalypse*, 330.

⁸²⁷ Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 909; Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, 431.

⁸²⁸ Aune further exemplifies such occurrence with an identic construction in 2 Kgs 23:7, where γέμειν is followed by a genitive then by an accusative, also coordinated by the same preposition as above, whereas 2 Sam 23:7 confers a parallel for the peculiar case of γέμειν followed by accusative. (Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 909.)

⁸²⁹ Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 935.

cleanliness of the outside of the cup and of the plate with the inner filth encompassing greed and self-indulgence.

However, this contrast is decisive in directing us onto a correct interpretation of all the splendours enumerated so far in the appearance of the Great Whore.

The idea of abundance, of 'being full with', of 'being covered with' is not the only time, when the Beast and the Woman thematically converge. I have previously discussed their relationship with reference to the Whore's posture, as well as to the colour they share, respectively scarlet.

In this instance, I argue that their relationship could be further consolidated by the close association between the object of the Beast covering, i.e. names of blasphemy and the content of the Whore's cup, i.e. abominations and impurities. Such associations have strong ethical implications. These open up intratextual links to the context of the correct worship⁸³¹ in the Apocalypse.

Βδέλυγμα is to be understood as impurity, sexual promiscuity, a shameless attitude according to the OT. God finds abominable some things such as 'idols' (Ezek 5:9.11, 6:9), or 'wickedness' (Prov 8:7, 11:1 etc.) and the Israelites should keep away from them.⁸³²

In the LXX, βδέλυγμα/βδέλγματα are designations for idols: Deut 29:17, Jer 13:27, 39:35, 51:22, Ezek 5:9.11, 6:9.20, 8:6.9, 11:18, 16:1.2.22.47.58, 20:30, 23:36 (vile images) and they are explicitly identified as such in Jer 51:52.

The same is confirmed by the uses in the NT. Accordingly, βδέλυγμα/βδέλγματα, a rare term⁸³³ features in the NT as *terminus technicus* identifying the domain of the idolatrous worshipping, in the temple of Jerusalem (cf. Mark 13:14, Matt 24:15).⁸³⁴

In Luke 16:15, abomination becomes associated with the fact that God abhors what human beings value. In the same negative vein, in Rom 2:22 the designated term refers to paganism.

In the Apocalypse, βδέλυγμα features in 17:4.5, 21:27. If in the first instance in chapter 17, the term functions as object denoting content of the cup the Whore holds in her hand. In

⁸³⁰ Swete, *Commentary on Revelation*, 216; cf. Prigent, *Commentary on the Apocalypse of St. John*, 488 (ft. 15).

⁸³¹ Cf. Frey, *The Relevance of the Roman Imperial Cult*, 240f.

⁸³² W. Foerster, art. Bdélygma in: *TDNT*, 103; cf. Murphy, *Fallen is Babylon*, 355.

There are arrays of examples in which abominations are described: Lev 11:10ff, Dan 9:27, 11:31, 12:11, Isa 1:13, 1 Macc 1:54, Zech 9:7. (Lupieri, *A Commentary on the Apocalypse of John*, 257.)

⁸³³ Swete, *Commentary on Revelation*, 216; cf. Ruiz, *Ezekiel in the Apocalypse*, 330.

⁸³⁴ Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 936; cf. Prigent, 489 and Ruiz, *Ezekiel in the Apocalypse*, 330-331. Ruiz argues in favour of a Danielic model (Dan 9:27, 11:31, 12:11) as inspiration for Luke 16:15, Mark 13:14, Matt 24:15. That is why he argues for the interpretation of the abominations in the Prostitute's cup as involving idolatry.

the following verse, she is named “mother of all abominations on earth” –ἡ μήτηρ τῶν πορνῶν καὶ τῶν βδελυγμάτων τῆς γῆς (v.5). Additionally, the ones who practice abomination are excluded from the New Jerusalem (21:27(8), 22:3.15).

Given these references to idolatry, it does not come as a surprise why the Whore undergoes divine judgment.

The case incongruence of ‘full with’ (accusative) with the ‘impurities of her fornication’ (gentive) –τὰ ἀκάθαρτα τῆς πορνείας αὐτῆς is accounted for by Beale, as possibly the object of the participle ἔχουσα.⁸³⁵

Smalley interprets the conjunction καὶ epexegetically to βδέλυγματα, elaborating on the type of the abomination. As a result, τὰ ἀκάθαρτα τῆς πορνείας αὐτῆς could be translated, as “that is the impurities of her fornication”.⁸³⁶

Irrespective of how we account with this disparity, the phrasing above, ‘the impurities of her fornication’ contains elements which belong to the line of dichotomies in the Apocalypse: clean/unclean, heaven/earth, virginity/fornication, bride/whore etc.

The adjective ἀκάθαρτος occurs in the Apocalypse in association with unclean, demonic and deceptive things, with idols (cf. 16:13-14, 18:2, 21:27).⁸³⁷

Purity/impurity was defined in the OT in relation to the cult⁸³⁸ (cf. Deut 14): anything that destroys order in the cult is classified as impure and contagious: animals (Lev 11), diseases (Lev 13f), bodily emissions (Lev 15), sexuality out of wedlock (Lev 18), in other words anything having as result ‘defilement’ (Deut 22:22).

These associations between chastity and purity were kept also with 2 Cor 12:21, Eph 5:3 (Rev 14:14). Especially in Rev 22:11, (cf. 1 Thess 4:3-7), ‘impure’ is the antonym of ‘holy’.⁸³⁹

Maintaining the larger cultic context of idol worshipping, in which the Whore’s attributes unravel, Sals interprets the horrendous content of the cup as a libation wine offered for some idol-worshipping ceremony, or something similar, perceived by John as a false liturgy.⁸⁴⁰

“Idolatry is not restricted to the cultic sphere that is a reality with profound roots in the economic and political arena as well.”⁸⁴¹

⁸³⁵ Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 857.

⁸³⁶ Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, 430.

⁸³⁷ Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, 431.

⁸³⁸ Sals, *Die Biographie*, 119.

⁸³⁹ Sals, *Die Biographie*, 45.

⁸⁴⁰ Sals, *Die Biographie*, 111.

⁸⁴¹ Ruiz, *Ezekiel in the Apocalypse*, 331.

Nevertheless, the opposition between the similar constructions ‘wine of God’ and ‘the woman’s beverage’ points to a loss of boundaries, to annihilating differences between creation and Creator. In this framework, the ones who drink form the woman’s concoction praise creation, the corporeality, the bodily more than their Creator. In doing so, they become blind (inebriated) in their perception regarding the Almighty.

The construction ‘of her prostitution’ –τῆς πορνείας αὐτῆς is mentioned for the second time in this chapter, linking the wine of her [i.e. Whore’s] fornication –οἶνος τῆς πορνείας αὐτῆς (v.2) with the impurities of her prostitution –τὰ ἀκάθαρτα τῆς πορνείας αὐτῆς.

Since an extensive discussion of πόρνη, respectively πορνεία was provided in the previous subsections, I shall not repeat the already mentioned.

However, I would like to reiterate the fact that the construction –τῆς πορνείας αὐτῆς parallels that describing God’s wrath –τῆς ὀργῆς αὐτοῦ.⁸⁴²

Additionally, the explanation offered previously to ποτήριον could highlight the trial of the gendered character to imitate God sacrilegiously in her actions. The implications of her posture evident in worldwide influence, as well as the use of expensive clothes and jewelry are constitutive of the fact that the Great Whore arrogates upon herself a divine right.

In Apocalypse 17, besides the mysterious content of the Whore’s cup in this verse, there are mentioned two important drinks, respectively ‘blood’ and ‘wine’.

While ‘wine’ belongs to God, ‘blood’ is mentioned with the Prostitute. The latter motif could be inspired by the harlot persecutor model⁸⁴³ as depicted in Jer 2:34: the lifeblood of the innocent poor is found on the Prostitute’s skirts.

Similarly, the Whore will be depicted as drunk with the blood of the martyrs in 17:6, which will be also repeated in 18:24 (cf. 19:2). The image is not singular for it was previously employed previously, as forcibly intoxicating “all nations” with the “wrathful wine of its prostitution” (14:8; 18:3), with which then “earth-dwellers have become drunk” (17:2).

Besides the persecutor nature of the Prostitute, her intoxicating influence entails a “deception of people so that they acquiesce idol worship”⁸⁴⁴ (cf. 14:8, 17:2), as well as ‘amazement’ (v.6).

The next chapter reuses the image of deception in 18:23, when Babylon is accused of deceiving all nations with her sorcery –ὅτι ἐν τῇ φαρμακείᾳ σου ἐπλανήθησαν πάντα τὰ ἔθνη.

⁸⁴² Sals, *Die Biographie*, 108.

⁸⁴³ Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 855.

⁸⁴⁴ Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 855.

The Greek word φαρμακεία can refer positively to a ‘medicine’ but also to ‘sorcery’, or a narcotic, poisonous drug.⁸⁴⁵

Subsequently, Babylon the Whore does not offer good wine, but a dangerous poisonous narcotic with disastrous consequences for the ones consuming it.

Additionally, through intoxication, sensuous and luxurious apparel, the woman effectively *seduces* the kings of the earth to prostitute themselves with her (17:2; 18:3). Indeed, this adultery by the kings of the earth is elaborated further as “living in excess (luxury) with it/her” –οἱ βασιλεῖς τῆς γῆς οἱ μετ’ αὐτῆς [...] στρηνιάσαντες (18:9).

Summary

By evaluating the intratexts, I have shown that important characters hold objects at dramatic moments in the Apocalypse, so the depiction of the Great Whore is conceived in the same line of ideas.

The golden cup in the woman’s hand matches perfectly with the previous enumeration of luxurious items.

However, if we move beyond the literal use, in the Apocalypse, the cup has a symbolic value: it is opposed to the cup of God, usually incurring judgment.

Since the content of the cup features a πόρν- cognate, it functions to unite the scene of the Whore (from the previous subunit) with that of the woman. The (whore-) woman’s cup brings about a loss of commonsense to whomever mingles with her.

The phrasing of the so-far-unheard content combines metaphors of idol worship with intoxication united by a strong sexual compound.

The strong ethical dimension of the above image opens up a whole range of dichotomies, where purity is contrasted with impurity.

By encompassing all the symbolic items in the description of the woman, as well as the mysterious source of her success, the Great Whore is *responsible* for abominations and impurities of her prostitution.

In view of the above, the ‘woman’ and the ‘whore’ are identical generically and functionally, so the appellatives could be used interchangeably.

Although I mentioned that the gendered character in the Apocalypse unites designations such as ‘whore’ and ‘woman’, they occurred with different accounts (the angel’s and the

⁸⁴⁵ Cf. George Abbott-Smith, *A Manual Lexicon of the New Testament*, s.v. φαρμακία, New York: Scribner, 1937, 466.

Seer's). In this verse 'woman' and 'whore' converge in order to denote one entity solely – the enemy subjected to divine judgment, the Great Whore.

The corporeal dimension will be continued in the following verse, as well as in the subsequent interpretation of the angel.

4.2 Provisional Assessment (4)

It is generally accepted that the majority of exegetical analyses of the gendered character in Apocalypse 17 confines the feminine imagery to verses 3 and 4 in Apocalypse 17.

The current analysis regarding v. 4 acknowledges the above assumption and attempts at correcting it. This is in accordance with the scope of this study identifies the feminine imagery in various references, scattered throughout chapter 17.

The conceptual domain 'woman' deals with the superficiality of the studied appearance (featuring precious linen, and jewels, and precious objects). The description in v. 4 is exclusively passive, probably objectifying for the woman, just like other cases in the Apocalypse.⁸⁴⁶

The Seer is actual reporting the tableau before his eyes: he describes a "woman clothed in purple and scarlet and adorned with gold and jewels and pearls, holding a golden cup in her hand."

Her description in terms of dress and jewels is not at all devoid of symbolism at the textual level of the Apocalypse. As it was shown, such details are important for they circumscribe more appropriately the character in discussion.

One should note however, that although mentioned in the vision of 3b-6a, none of the items –purple, scarlet, gold, jewels, pearls, cup –is interpreted by the angel in the section dealing with the interpretation of the vision (17: 7-18).

This may be due probably to the fact that one should understand them collectively: taken together, these allude to the Whore's extravagant *wealth, arrogance, pretension of royalty* –commonplaces presented previously with other occasions.

Of all the details pertaining to the Whore's description the only element, which is mentioned in the interpretation of the angel, is that she will lose her clothes (17:16).

The dress discourse is thus placed within the dimension of her divine punishment, for she will be rendered naked –γυμνή in 17:16.

This act prompts an extremely important intratextual connection with the various connotations of 'desert' from the previous verse, as well as an intertextual link with some of the OT prophetic texts, where a change in status is marked profoundly by a change of clothing.

⁸⁴⁶ The passive character is also very well represented with the Woman Clothed with Sun and the Bride of the Lamb.

By presenting every single item of her clothing in detail, I attempted and hopefully succeeded in elaborating two aspects.

The feminine source domain of the items presented reinstated the importance of the corporeal aspect in the portrayal of the Great Whore, which historical-critical interpretations usually elude.

In addition, the associations of these items reinscribed the negative associations, by contributing to the Whore's indirect characterization. Clothing and jewels belong to the larger theme of the Apocalypse's use of ornamentation and apparel in order to delineate boundaries between the pure and impure ones, between honorable and dishonorable behaviour, insiders and outsiders.

By this, I mean that *luxury* does not fit within the apocalyptic ascetic frame favoured throughout the book.

Unjustified claims of authority stemming from *hubris* –just like in the Beast's case –as well as *murder*, to which the Apocalypse adds a cosmological scale, materialized ultimately in the persecution of the righteous.

Concisely, the interest John shows in the description of the Whore is rather ethical than simply voyeuristic.

This is accomplished by means of repeating certain cognates, such as the ones for gold, for example, the Seer tries to show the abundance of sinful behaviour.

Via similar colours, as well the use of “full” in rather parallel descriptions, the Whore is also put in connection with the Beast.

By means of the emotional, as well as semantic charge of certain concepts previously analyzed, John aims to complete the image we got in the first subunit (vv. 1-2), where a ‘whore’ was introduced.

With these observations, I have shown that extending beyond the Apocalypse's textual borders in terms of rich textual meaning is not always a necessary venture. As a result, one can rightly identify the extent and implications of the colours by inferring from and considering them in their apocalyptic context. The interest John shows in the description of the Whore is more ethical in character, than voyeuristic.

By means of repeating certain cognates, such as the ones for gold for example, the Seer tries to show the abundance of sinful behaviour.

In view of similar colours, as well the use of the phrasing “full” in almost parallel descriptions, the Whore is also put in connection with the Beast.

The content of the Whore's cup bears a very close resemblance and links with the religious cultic phenomenon.

The importance of the OT context has been stressed several times throughout this analysis. Without these intertextual connections, readers would have a different perception and subsequently, interpretation of the gendered character. When analyses of feminist substance overfocus in an unjustified manner on the corporeal dimensions of the image, we get a reductionist picture.

Additionally, considering the above, I would like to stress that the metaphor of the Great Whore functions in an intersubjective way: while it is grounded in the realities of the 1st century, it also relates to us in a postmodern environment.

Though this study does rely extensively on the historical interpretations of each item in the description of the Great Whore, it cannot however remain confined to 1st century realities. When transposed onto postmodern issues the presentation and negative evaluation of a gendered character, such as the Great Whore becomes very problematic. On the one hand, certain gender-related stereotypes are reiterated, aiding in strengthening the androcentric ideology. On the other hand, the negative assessment of the Great Whore is problematic when conceived as a matter of the readers' dissociation from what is read. Subsequently, everything in the portrayal of the Great Whore, including her corporeal aspect could be evaluated negatively and even condemned.

Although this approach brings to the foreground the question of whether text creates reality or reality creates text, certain aspects in the presentation of the woman are very problematic especially that John reiterates the image of sexual promiscuity with every verse he adds to the Whore's description.

It is then crucial to underline the rhetorical function and force of the images, such as the ones prompted by the list of items in v.4, which occur the same time undivided from the generic character.

5. Titles of Harlotry

καὶ ἐπὶ τὸ μέτωπον αὐτῆς ὄνομα γεγραμμένον,

μυστήριον, βαβυλὼν ἡ μεγάλη,
ἡ μήτηρ τῶν πορνῶν
καὶ τῶν βδελυγμάτων τῆς
γῆς

(And upon her forehead a name has been written, Mystery, Babylon the Great, mother of whores and of the earth's abominations)

5.1 Preliminary Considerations

The Seer was invited to witness the judgment of the Great Whore, seated upon many waters. It is in this verse only –after her attire and bejeweled appearance –that we are informed on her identity. This brings the third and the last component in the Great Whore's dimensions, namely the political one. Up to now, we are provided indirectly with details, hinting and possibly circumscribing and/or identifying the implications of this character.

The theme of the previous subunit features also with verse 5. Similarities are registered in the form and function. As a result, this verse continues the description of the Whore (v.2) –turned woman (vv.3-4), elaborating more on the femininity of the apparition, as well as on her wickedness.

The cognates of πόρν- operate in this verse in an interesting fashion. If so far, the abominable acts of the Great Whore were disclosed, we are introduced now to her motherly aspect, as 'genetrix' of whores.

Regarding the structure of this verse, the name βαβυλὼν ἡ μεγάλη lies at its core. A local deictic precedes the Whore's name –ἐπὶ τὸ μέτωπον, being in turn, followed by a complex apposition –ἡ μήτηρ τῶν πορνῶν καὶ τῶν βδελυγμάτων τῆς γῆς, which can invite to different readings as presented below.

The introductory καί, just like in the previous verses functions as a connector of this particular verse with the one preceding it. It continues the description of the woman, started in v.3a –καὶ εἶδον γυναῖκα καθημένην ἐπὶ θηρίον κόκκινον, as well as introduces

some new information, which would confirm the appellation of v. 1a –πόρνη from the previous subunit.

Up until this verse, the *whore-woman* has never been named, being introduced as either πόρνη (v.1a) or γυνή (v.4a).

Now she will be introduced in a new manifestation, that of mother –μήτηρ, as the inscription on her forehead reads βαβυλὼν ἡ μεγάλη, ἡ μήτηρ τῶν πορνῶν καὶ τῶν βδελυγμάτων τῆς γῆς.

The name ‘Babylon’ –which will be taken up and used exclusively in the following chapter (Rev 18) especially when discussing the whore’s actual punishment –stands in an extended apposition.

It not only adds a further dimension to what we discussed so far, but also confirms what was argued in the first subunit (vv.1-2). We deal with a ‘great’ –μεγάλη (vv.1a.5. 18) figure, who is not only a ‘whore’ (v.1a, 5) but also the ‘mother of whores’ herself. At the same time, the biological attribute extends as it encompasses “the earth’s abominations” (v.5).

The implications of the name become thus universal. Although the characterization we obtained in vv. 3-4 was of a particular kind, now, in v.5 one can see the extent of the Great Whore’s wickedness, her destructive power.

As mentioned previously, it is my contention that the name enunciated above points to the third aspect of the Whore’s identity, namely, to the political dimension, important for the following chapter.

This fact is not overall acknowledged, for some authors, among whom Ruiz, interpret the motherly dimension of the Whore as an “immediate return to gynomorphic imagery.”⁸⁴⁷

For them, the change in focus, from whore to city occurs at a later point, in the last verse of chapter 17⁸⁴⁸ when the mystery of Babylon is explained as referring to the ‘great city that has dominion on Earth’. Starting with the beginning of the next chapter, the dimension gains its full political power.

Upon her forehead, a name

Along with the hand, in which the Great Whore holds a golden cup, the other body part John mentions is her ‘forehead’ –μέτωπον.

⁸⁴⁷ Ruiz, *Ezekiel in the Apocalypse*, 334.

⁸⁴⁸ For exemplification, cf. Ruiz, *Ezekiel in the Apocalypse*, 286.

As we can see John is not particularly interested in facial descriptions with different characters in the Apocalypse, but rather focuses on key body parts, imbued with symbolic meaning: hands, in which the characters hold different objects,⁸⁴⁹ or heads, feet, hair, eyes, with various examples of anthropomorphism and zoomorphism.⁸⁵⁰

Within the Apocalypse, the branding of ownership would be noticed on the forehead (7:3, 9:4, 13:16, 14:1.9, 17:5, 20:4, 22:4).

The marking on the forehead, as Kowalski points out can act as a protection-sign in Ezek 9:4.⁸⁵¹ Such is τὸ σημεῖον ἐπὶ τὰ μέτωπα τῶν ἀνδρῶν –the mark on the foreheads of those who sigh and groan over all the abominations that are committed in it [Jerusalem]. Conversely, a similar image of a σημεῖον used on foreheads is a “mark of destruction” –τὸ σημεῖον τῆς ἀπωλείας (cf. Psalm 15:9).

God’s servants were sealed on their foreheads (7:3, 14:1 22:4) and the monster’s worshippers were marked either on the forehead or/and on the right hand (13:16, 14:9, 20:4).

Additionally, 19:16 notes ‘thigh’ as the place where the rider on the white horse (19:11-12) had a name inscribed, i.e. ἐπὶ τὸν μηρὸν. Its implications will be in following mentioned.

In other words, “like the Hebrew נֶזֶק the Greek word, ὄνομα carries information about the identity and essential characteristics of whom or what is named”⁸⁵² pointing ultimately to the reality of a being.⁸⁵³

The object of branding can include semantically related terms in the Apocalypse. Some of these list ‘seal’ –σφραγίς (9:4), ‘mark’ –χάραγμα (13:16, 14:1.11) and ‘name’ –ὄνομα as mentioned in 14:1, 22:4.

Irrespective of the type of branding, markers of such kind function either to designate the person wearing it, or the one with whom the bearer of the name stands in close relation.⁸⁵⁴

Besides the occurrence in 17:5, ὄνομα is conjoined with μέτωπον in 14:1 and 22:4, these times with reference to God’s faithful followers, having their name written on their foreheads.⁸⁵⁵

⁸⁴⁹ Cf. the previous part, respectively, v.4.

⁸⁵⁰ Most of these elements feature with the descriptions of clothes presented in Table 3, of the previous subsection.

⁸⁵¹ Kowalski, *Die Rezeption des Propheten Ezechiel*, 183.

⁸⁵² Räßle, *The Metaphor of the City*, 156.

⁸⁵³ Prigent, *Commentary on the Apocalypse of St. John*, 489.

⁸⁵⁴ Swete, *Commentary on Revelation*, 218.

⁸⁵⁵ This also conjoins with the idea of the ‘Name’ alone can give salvation, as described in Deut 6:8 (cf. Lupieri, *A Commentary on the Apocalypse of John*, 260).

In virtue of the fact that the whore-turned-woman of the current unit bears a name, she is thus included in the list of apocalyptic characters/figures that bear names. Among them I mention *Death* –[ὁ] θάνατος –in 6:8, *Wormwood* –ὁ Ὑψινθος –in 8:11, *Abbadon* –Ἀβαδδὼν (Ἀπολλύων) –in 9:11, and the place *Armageddon* –Ἀρμαγεδών –in 16:16.⁸⁵⁶

Due to the content of her name she belongs to the group of the ones carrying the mark of the Beast, described 13:16-17.

Similarly, the followers of the Beast stand in contrast with the companions of the Lamb (14:1), the 144,000 (7:1-8, 2:3), as well as with the name of the ones given the promise of the victor (3:12) and with the name of the twelve tribes is on every gate in the New Jerusalem (21:12).

Having a name is of importance as only those, whose names are mentioned in the Book of Life – βιβλίον τῆς ζωῆς shall receive eternal life (3:5, 13:8, 17:8, cf. Luke 10:20, Phil 4:3).⁸⁵⁷

By contrast, the lack of reward ensuing from this branding is valid for the names of the ones belonging to the Beast, who shall find no place in the Book of Life (13:8, 17:18).⁸⁵⁸

These are cast into the lake fire (20:15), excluded from the New Jerusalem and labeled clearly as “the cowardly, the faithless, the polluted, the murderers, the fornicators, the sorcerers, the idolaters and all liars” (21:8, cf. 21:27) – τοῖς δὲ δειλοῖς καὶ ἀπίστοις καὶ ἐβδελυγμένοις καὶ φονεῦσιν καὶ πόρνοις καὶ φαρμάκοις καὶ εἰδωλολάτραις καὶ πᾶσιν τοῖς ψευδέσιν. As such, they will suffer a second death – ὁ θάνατος ὁ δεύτερος.

From the above, one can see that the name not only serves as means of classifying, but also as means of ordering, of establishing order in the new creation. The Chosen Ones are thus separated from the rest, only they will rejoice in the divine city.⁸⁵⁹

In search for similitudes regarding the association between ‘whore’ and ‘forehead’, as well for the implications of carrying different types of branding on the forehead, intertextual sources are usually considered.

The ones at hand are provided by some prophetic texts of the OT, where the political dimension of Israel is mingled with the cultic component in a very powerful image.

⁸⁵⁶ Sals, *Die Biographie*, 82.

⁸⁵⁷ Sals, *Die Biographie*, 83.

⁸⁵⁸ Ruiz, *Ezekiel in the Apocalypse*, 333.

⁸⁵⁹ Sals, *Die Biographie*, 83. She notes the reciprocity between the walls of New Jerusalem carrying the inscriptions of the sons of God (cf. 21:12.14, 22:4), and, in the return, of the chosen ones carrying on their forehead the name of Jerusalem, of God and of Jesus (3:12).

Considering the first of the two aspects, the closest OT reference could be found with Jer 3:3. When criticizing the lewdness of Israel, God refers to *הַזֶּה אֵפֶס הַזֶּה* –‘the forehead of a whore’, refusing to be ashamed. This reference is placed in the larger context of the improper practices of idol worshipping denounced by Isa 48:4 and Ezek 3:7.

The ‘forehead of the whore’ is also antithetical with Exod 29:6, 36:37, Lev 8:9 (cf. Ezek 21:31, Sir 45:12)⁸⁶⁰ i.e. *πέταλον χρυσοῦν* –the rosette which is to be placed on the High Priest, that reads *ἀγίασμα κυρίου*⁸⁶¹ (cf. Exod 28:36).

Whereas the inscription on the forehead of the Whore reads *ἡ μήτηρ τῶν πορνῶν καὶ τῶν βδελυγμάτων τῆς γῆς* –‘mother of whores and of the earth’s abominations’, such a parallel could therefore suggest a parody and cheap imitation of the High Priest.

As for non-Christian sources on the function of human branding, Seneca, *Declamations* 1.2.7⁸⁶² and Juvenal, *Satires* 6.122 are commonly employed. These sources allude to an ancient custom of prostitutes wearing their name on their forehead.⁸⁶³

Invariably, this can be perceived metaphorically as “mark of disgrace and ridicule.”⁸⁶⁴

However, recent studies agree in that there is not enough data to confirm this claim.⁸⁶⁵

Even if the sources for this image cannot be identified, this social phenomenon is amply documented in anthropological studies: “human branding was virtually unknown in the Roman world but tattooing was far more common than hitherto suspected”.⁸⁶⁶ Applied on the forehead,⁸⁶⁷ it acted as a “sign of degradation”.⁸⁶⁸

From this vantage point, this could create a contrast between what the Whore arrogates regarding her own persona, including posture, dress and ornamentation and the actual reality of having her name tattooed upon her forehead.

⁸⁶⁰ Lupieri, *A Commentary on the Apocalypse of John*, 258; Cf. Sals, *Die Biographie*, 83.

⁸⁶¹ The other variant Exod 36:37 has the dative *ἀγίασμα κυρίῳ*. Sir 45:12 reads simply *ἀγιάσματος*.

⁸⁶² The Latin formulation of interest is “nomen tuum pependit in fronte”.

⁸⁶³ This phenomenon is also featured in the exegetical commentaries by Charles, *Revelation* 2:65, Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 858, Swete, *Commentary on Revelation*, 217; Prigent, *Commentary on the Apocalypse of St. John*, 489, (ft. 17), Ruiz, *Ezekiel in the Apocalypse*, 332 (ft. 78).

⁸⁶⁴ C.P. Jones, Stigma: Tattooing and Branding in Graeco-Roman Antiquity, in: *The Journal of Roman Studies* 77/ 1987, 139-155, 150.

⁸⁶⁵ Alan James Beagley, *The "Sitz im Leben" of the Apocalypse, with Particular Reference to the Role of the Church's Enemies*, (Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft 50), Berlin: de Gruyter, 1987, 102; Lupieri, *A Commentary on the Apocalypse of John*, 257f.; Rissi, *Die Verführung*, 55; Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, 431; Glancy and Moore, How Typical a Roman Prostitute, 559 (ft. 45).

⁸⁶⁶ Glancy and Moore, How Typical a Roman Prostitute, 559.

⁸⁶⁷ Jones, Stigma, 142-143.

⁸⁶⁸ Jones, Stigma, 143. He argues that “the author of the Revelation perhaps imagines the Woman not only as whore, but as a whore of the most degraded kind, a tattooed slave.” (Jones, Stigma, 151).

The image is thus transformed from the queen-like apparition to the slave-like presentation. Maybe, her mystery lies in the branding, since the Great Whore's looks are definitely deceitful and deceiving. With 'mystery' divine intervention on the behalf of the angel is imperious.

Considering further the social aspect of branding prostitutes, it also implies not only the depersonification of the human being in general, but also of the woman in particular. In her corporeal dimension, the Great Whore becomes reified and commoditized.⁸⁶⁹

This aspect is part of modern concerns and is imbued with feminist substance.

The feminist agenda may engage actively and conscientiously in combating real⁸⁷⁰ prostitutes' social stigma and isolation by referring to the image of the Great Whore as depicted in the Apocalypse.

Summary

The name of the Great Whore circumscribes her identity more closely as well as confirms explicitly already described features, thus connecting semantically with the previous unit.

The Whore's name appeared on her forehead.

First, the significance of this body part was analyzed. In view of intra- as well as intertextual relations, the forehead, or more exactly what is written on it designates primarily that person's identity.

Her disclosed identity operates as a classificatory category: it delineates boundaries between the one named, respectively the Great Whore and God's chosen ones. The larger intertextual context provided references from the prophetic writings, where idolatry alluded at was constantly condemned. The OT references have also shown the contrast between the Great Whore and the High Priest's appearance. This contrast also implies the idea of imitation, well-known so far with the antagonistic presentations of the Great Whore and God, or God's chosen.

Next, I have cited from Ancient sources in an attempt to extend the boundaries of the significance of carrying a name on one's forehead. The information pointed to human branding as to a sign of degradation, featuring mostly with slaves.

In particular, although contemporary sources offer less support of an Ancient custom of branding prostitutes, they do offer some valuable insight into the social aspect as well as

⁸⁶⁹ Glancy and Moore, *How Typical a Roman Prostitute*, 554.

⁸⁷⁰ Also cf. Susannah Cornwall, Nicholas Buxton, *Theology and Sexuality*, London: SCM Press, 2013, 113-116.

implications of human branding reverberated through the ages in the lives of prostitutes in the Graeco-Roman World.

Phrased in gender-informed terms, the phenomenon of prostitution with all its implications still affects our lives today. Issues such as loss of human essence, of human content, as well as commodification of women were raised and elaborated upon by authors like Caroline Vander Stichele or Avaren Ipsen, who also used the image of the Great Whore in their respective argumentations. The feminist agenda may actively and conscientiously use the inherited stereotyping to combat the propagation and vicious circle issued by this phenomenon spread across all cultures.

As a result, in assessing this phenomenon, a non-judgmental insight is imposed.

Has been written

Based on its neuter (singular) form, the participle γεγραμμένον –‘has been written’ can function both as part of the prepositional phrase ἐπὶ τὸ μέτωπον [...] γεγραμμένον or as an object complement to ‘name’ as in ὄνομα γεγραμμένον.

Cognates of the verb γράφω occur 29 times in the Revelation, mostly with three particular usages: in the aorist imperative form (γράψον), the verb is connected with a divine voice commanding the Seer to write the things revealed to him in 1:11.19, 2:1.8.12.18, 3:1, 10:4, 14:13, 19:9, 21:5.

Another finite verbal form is used with the keeping of a promise towards the one who conquers – ὁ νικῶν in 3:12.

The perfect passive participle γεγραμμένον occurs, except 17:5, in 2:17, 5:1, 14:1, 19:11.12.16, having a double function, both identifying and ordering.

Additionally, 21:12 mentions a similar compound (ἐπιγεγραμμένα, translated as ‘inscribed’ in NRS), with the description of the New Jerusalem. The city has who has the name of the sons of Israel inscribed is thus superior to the Whore’s.⁸⁷¹

Judging by the occurrences in the Apocalypse, the written aspect is extremely important. It gives an official status to the object, or person on whom is engraved, a status beyond any doubt.

The passive form γεγραμμένον employed in this verse exhibits interest concerning the agent, namely, the one who wrote the name on the Whore’s forehead.

⁸⁷¹ Sals, *Die Biographie*, 83.

In view with other passive occurrences in the Apocalypse, this particular usage may be accounted by a *passivum divinum*.

Given the omnipotent image of God, as well the content of the despicable name written on the Whore's forehead, writing could have a further function, namely that of judgment: God singles her out as belonging to the Beast and its followers. Subsequently, her judgment, as well as punishment by divine hand is justified (cf. 17:16, also 19:2).

Further, the grammatical construction of 17:5 καὶ ἐπὶ τὸ μέτωπον αὐτῆς ὄνομα γεγραμμένον – *and upon her forehead a name has been written* indicates a conspicuous analogy with 19:16 καὶ ἐπὶ τὸν μηρὸν αὐτοῦ ὄνομα γεγραμμένον – “and upon his thigh a name has been written”.

Given their function and importance in the apocalyptic scenario, one should agree that the two characters are brought into an opposable relation with each other.

The importance of this intratextual dependence has not been really taken into account by commentators so far, although some of them, while noticing the contrast, limit themselves to only pointing it out.⁸⁷²

Nevertheless, the antithesis between 17:5 and 19:16 is not accidental, but aims thus at reinforcing a parody to God.

When considering the importance of the representative in 19:16, paired with the singular occurrence of the noun ‘thigh’ in the Apocalypse and the NT, a secondary intertextual insight into the OT occurrences of the term μηρός is offered. It operates in the larger theme of making an oath (Gen 24:2.9, 47:29, Num 5:21)⁸⁷³ representing an extremely serious engagement of God with humanity.

Therefore, the Whore's forehead, just as her posture point to her engagement with the Beast, to her being subservient to the Beast's usurping claims of worship.

Moreover, the description of God in Psalm 45:4⁸⁷⁴ includes wearing a sword on His thigh. This could indicate a close resemblance with the titles assumed by the character in 19:13-16, including ‘Word of God’ –ὁ λόγος τοῦ θεοῦ (19:13), and ‘King of Kings and Lord of Lords’ –Βασιλεὺς βασιλέων καὶ κύριος κυρίων (19:16). Such titles are conspicuously superior to ‘Babylon the Great, mother of whores and of Earth's abominations’ –βαβυλῶν ἡ μεγάλη, ἡ μήτηρ τῶν πορνῶν καὶ τῶν βδελυγμάτων τῆς γῆς.

⁸⁷² Cf. among others Harrington, *Revelation*, 174.

⁸⁷³ John R. Spencer, art. “Thigh” in: David Noel Freedman, Allen C. Myers (eds.), *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*, Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000, 1301.

⁸⁷⁴ The verse I am referring with Psalm 45:4 is the following: *Gird your sword on your thigh, O mighty one, in your glory and majesty.*

Summary

The written character of things or events in the Apocalypse is very important, for they carry dramatic weight in unfolding the apocalyptic scenario.

The implications of the passive form of the name written on the Whore's forehead revolve around judgment.

In virtue of her function within the unfolding of the apocalyptic events, she joins the doomed group of the Beast(s) and its followers.

It is not therefore the first time when the Whore's contrast with divine matters and representatives is mentioned. She is opposed on the one hand to the character of those, whose names are written on the walls and foundations of New Jerusalem (cf. 21:12.14). On the other hand, she is antithetical to the Word of God (cf. 19:16). In terms of the notoriousness of her title, as well as the Whore's slave-like status, the branding is a means of differentiating from God's faithful followers.

Mystery

Although overtly written on the woman's forehead, the name is referred as 'mystery.' Even more paradoxical is the reading or voicing of the respective name.⁸⁷⁵

Names are not always overt in the Apocalypse. Sometimes, they hide identities (2:17, 19:12) revealed only the ones wearing them.⁸⁷⁶ However, the divine implications of the mysterious name of the rider in 19:12 will be subsequently revealed in 19:13.16.

In 17:5 the noun 'mystery' –μυστήριον associates with 'name' –ὄνομα.

Μυστήριον appears four times in the Apocalypse respectively in 1:20, 10:7, 17:5.7.

Three out of four occurrences are followed by a genitive: τὸ μυστήριον τῶν ἑπτὰ ἀστέρων –the mystery of the seven stars in 1:20, τὸ μυστήριον τοῦ θεοῦ –the mystery of God in 10:7, τὸ μυστήριον τῆς γυναίκος καὶ τοῦ θηρίου –the mystery of the woman and the beast in 17:7.

Regarding the last occurrence, in 17:5 μυστήριον appears isolated, two verses later, in 17:7 it will become the "mystery of the woman and of the beast that carries her" –τὸ μυστήριον τῆς γυναίκος καὶ τοῦ θηρίου τοῦ βαστάζοντος αὐτήν.

⁸⁷⁵ Pezzoli-Olgia, *Täuschung und Klarheit*, 146.

⁸⁷⁶ Sals, *Die Biographie*, 82.

Additionally, in two out of four instances, i.e. 1:20 and 17:7 (cf. 17:18) μυστήριον is subsequently explained. The explanations provided⁸⁷⁷ entail a contrast between the “mystery of the seven stars” (cf. 10:7) which belongs to *God* and the “mystery of the woman and the beast” in 17:7, pertaining to God’s opponent –*Satan*.

By the formulation ‘mystery of the woman and the beast’ the anchoring with the previously introduced characters, namely Beast is achieved. This phrasing points to the unity of the two characters. Subsequently, this confirms the assumption that what is said of one is also valid for the other.

The above formulation entails not only a divine hermeneutical imperative dictated by the name of the Whore. By extension, it now refers to the complex picture as a whole, to the vision marked by μυστήριον.

As previously mentioned, the problem posed by v.5 is whether to understand μυστήριον in apposition with ὄνομα, or with βαβυλῶν ἡ μεγάλη since grammatically, all key terms display the same case and number.

The first option would be to consider ‘mystery’ as referring either to ‘a name’, in which case, the translation would render the use genitive as ‘*a name of mystery*’.

It can also be translated by grammatically equivalent terms ‘*a name, a mystery*’. The name, in this case “Babylon the Great”, written upon the Whore’s forehead is a mystery.

The other option could be to interpret ‘mystery’ as part of the woman’s name, in which case the punctuation would be the following “*a name: Mystery Babylon the Great*”.

Since the angel intends to explain in v.7 the ‘mystery’, one would rightfully opt for the first variant: the mystery is the name itself: *Babylon the Great*.⁸⁷⁸

This interpretation is consistent with other occurrences of the same title throughout the Apocalypse (cf. Babylon the Great in 14:8, 16:9, 18:2) and what follows could be viewed in terms of an appositional relationship.

When discussing the function of ‘mystery’ in the Apocalypse, it does not support a literal interpretation. An equation in terms of meaning of the noun ‘mystery’ –μυστήριον with the adverb ‘spiritually’ –πνευματικῶς (11:8),⁸⁷⁹ could be achieved although the two terms stem lexically from different roots.

The association between ‘mystery’ and ‘spiritually’ could get even more substance when considering the hidden identification of another important location in the Apocalypse,

⁸⁷⁷ Lupieri, *A Commentary on the Apocalypse of John*, 261.

⁸⁷⁸ Blount, *Revelation*, 315, cf. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 859 also Vander Stichele, Re-membering the Whore, 109, ft. 13, Osborne, *Revelation*, 612.

⁸⁷⁹ Charles, *Revelation* 2:65; Cf. Beckwith, *The Apocalypse of John*, 692, cf. Smalley, *Revelation to John*, 431.

namely Jerusalem, the city 'where also Lord was crucified' cryptically named 'Sodom and Egypt' (11:8).

In any case, 'mystery' would imply we are dealing with something that only God could explain via some divine revelation⁸⁸⁰ and could be linked to the fulfillment of God's plan (cf. 17:17, also 1:20, 10:7).

This terminology is not singular in the apocalypse but also features in other NT occurrences, which refer to the "mystery of salvation" in Rom 11:25, Eph 3:6-11, Col 1:26, and to the eschatological process in 2 Thess 2:7. With these references, the term gains an eschatological dimension.

However, by far the Judaic context of apocalyptic literature is relevant: with apocalypses, mysteries of God are revealed only to the chosen ones, by means of divine revelation. It is for this reason that the role of angelus interpres in aiding with their interpretations is important.

To exemplify, Dan 2: 18-30.47⁸⁸¹ could inspire the OT context prompting explanation of a divine mystery.

'Mystery' thus pertains to the realm of the transcendent, so the symbolical expression is a human response to an event, which extends beyond the natural human apprehension.

It is for this reason that the angel subsequently expresses the willingness to explain it to the Seer (17:7).

If unexplained, 'mystery' can lead to amazement that can have negative consequences for the inhabitants of the earth, just like in 13:3-8. As a result, it is related to a hermeneutical imperative. The Seer is overwhelmed with amazement (17:6) –ἐθαύμασα ἰδὼν αὐτὴν θαῦμα μέγα so the Angel offers him an interpretation of the vision, in which wisdom – σοφία plays a key role.

The wisdom is paired in this verse with rationality, the rational mind –νοῦς (v.9).⁸⁸²

⁸⁸⁰ Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 859; cf. Murphy, *Fallen is Babylon*, 356.

⁸⁸¹ Kowalski, *Die Rezeption des Propheten Ezechiel*, 182; cf. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 858; Smalley, *Revelation to John*, 431.

⁸⁸² Since secrecy seems to pertain to the very essence of revelation, 'mystery' is equated with 'secret' or with 'divine wisdom'. 'Divine wisdom' is known only through such revealed mysteries, since her abode is in heaven (1 Enoch 42: 1, 48: 1, 49: 1) also Dan and 1 Enoch and the human person as a result may see history in a totally new light (Rowland, *The Open Heaven*, 13).

In this manner, one can observe the contrast between the description of the vision in Apocalypse 17, where senses are involved and feelings are aroused and the interpretation of the vision, in which amazement is involved.

In contrast with the other occurrences of the word, this time, μυστήριον entails an aspect of irony, if considered from the prism of the demise of the character in chapter 17-18. The 'mystery' resides in the actual fulfillment of God's will. It delineates "the unexpected way in which the kingdom of evil will begin to be defeated: that kingdom will turn against itself and start to self-destruct even before Christ returns."⁸⁸³

Summary

After establishing that 'mystery' is not part of the title on the woman's forehead, I presented aspects related to its interpretation. The designation contains also a hint of irony, when read against the background offered by the title and the demise of the Whore. 'Mystery' usually implies elsewhere,⁸⁸⁴ the Apocalypse included, the necessity of a hermeneutical imperative of divine origin. It refers to unveiling a phenomenon.

Its function is similar with other intertextual references, where it operates similarly, bearing an eschatological nuance. Considering the occurrences, the readers are summoned to a careful reading of symbols.

Similarly, its occurrence with this verse is particularly highlights the importance of divine aid in the correct interpretation of the vision imbued with wisdom (cf. 17:9).

If readers had not considered 'mystery', its function and meaning in the Apocalypse, they would have remained anchored in the sensuous presentation of the Whore. They could not have understood her nature as well as the consequences of her disastrous acts.

By virtue of the association with the woman, 'mystery' here is negatively charged, pointing to unveiling the Great Whore's real character and function.

Babylon the Great

The name of mystery reads βαβυλὼν ἡ μεγάλη, ἡ μήτηρ τῶν πορνῶν καὶ τῶν βδελυγμάτων τῆς γῆς.

⁸⁸³ Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 858, cf. Osborne, *Revelation*, 612.

⁸⁸⁴ Apocalyptic writings are preoccupied with the disclosure of the divine secrets. (Rowland, *The Open Heaven*, 20).

The constitutive quality of these "mysteries" is not in the first instance their hiddenness, but their belonging to the heavenly (divine) world. (Collins, *Seers, Sibyls and Sages in Hellenistic Roman Judaism*, 29).

It combines the political resonances by association with the city 'Babylon', as well as gynomorphic traits, by the formulation 'mother' –μήτηρ. The title completes in the same register the picture delineated so far by the Seer, namely that of 'prostitute' –πόρνη and 'woman' –γυνή, also characterized by items belonging to the feminine domain, as it was amply shown.

Similarly, the title on the Whore's forehead reinstates motifs already known from previous analyses, such as that of 'whore' with 'mother of whores' –ή μήτηρ τῶν πορνῶν and the adjective 'great' –μεγάλη also featured in 17:1-2, as per the formulation 'Great Whore' –ή πόρνη ή μεγάλη. Now, the above mentioned adjective describes Babylon as 'Babylon the Great' –βαβυλὼν ή μεγάλη.

The Whore's extended name and her role as chief-prostitute is formulated.

She carries the name one of the most well known cities in the Antiquity, Babylon. Just like the ancient city Babylon, the Great Whore occupies a leading position, as 'mother of whores'.⁸⁸⁵

When describing the content of the Whore's cup, filled with abominations and the impurities of her fornication –ποτήριον (...) γέμον βδελυγμάτων καὶ τὰ ἀκάθαρτα τῆς πορνείας αὐτῆς, the noun 'abomination' relates semantically with the Great Whore. She is named by virtue of zeugma, mother of earth's abominations –ή μήτηρ (...) τῶν βδελυγμάτων τῆς γῆς.

Considering the above, the name is not as mysterious as one may initially think. Its phrasing has delineated certain interpretative coordinates. These were already established by the close intratextual connections.

The first part of the name reads Βαβυλὼν ή μεγάλη. The phrasing will be repeated verbatim in the following chapter focused on the destruction of the city (18:2.10⁸⁸⁶).

The name Βαβυλὼν appears six times in the Apocalypse, having the following cognates: *great* (14:8, 16:19, 17:5, 18:2.10.21) with the *cup of wrath* (14:8, 16:19, 17:5f, 18:2f), with *prostitution* (14:8, 17:5), with *downfall* (14:8, 16:19, 17:5f, 18:2.10.21)⁸⁸⁷ but also *city* (16:19, 17:5:18, 18:2.10.16. 19.21).

Prior to 17:5, 'Babylon' is not unknown to the readers: it occurred previously in 14:8 and 16:19.

⁸⁸⁵ Pezzoli-Olgiati, *Täuschung und Klarheit*, 147.

⁸⁸⁶ In 18:21, it will be referred as Babylon, the great city –Βαβυλὼν ή μεγάλη πόλις.

⁸⁸⁷ Sals, *Die Biographie*, 83.

These references are phrased in a way that assumes the readers were already familiar with this application,⁸⁸⁸ although, both μυστήριον and Βαβυλὼν refer in fact “to third party, hinted at but never explicitly named”.⁸⁸⁹

The adjective ‘great’ continues the cluster of images that revolve around a figure of power and greatness. The adjective inscribed on the woman’s forehead portrays her as the paragon of licentiousness, implied by the supra-dimensionality of ‘great’.

Not only that the protagonist was introduced as the Great Whore, few verses later (v.18), it will be referred as having power –βασιλεία over the kings of the earth.

Just like in the case of gold, which appears both in divine-related contexts, as well as in those of a Satanic, evil nature, the adjective μεγάλη notes within the Apocalypse, the most intense usages of all the NT, being ambivalently featured both with *good* (11:7,12:1, 15:1, 18:1) and *bad* (13:2.13, 17:2.5).⁸⁹⁰ Here, due to the context in which it operates, the adjective “great” intensifies the negative character of the designation.

When considering the triad employed to describe the character introduced as the Great Whore, respectively ‘whore-woman-city’, one can see that this adjective does not feature in one dimension of the triad, namely that of ‘woman’. It describes ‘Whore’ in 17:1 and 19:2, as well as the ‘city’ materialized as Babylon.

Subsequently, in the Apocalypse, the phrase ‘Babylon the great’ occurs five times (14:8, 16:19, 17:5, 18:2, and 18:21).

Light is shed on its meaning as Babylon is referred to as ἡ πόλις ἡ μεγάλη –the great city seven times in the book (11:8, 16:19, 17:18, 18:10.16.18.19.21).

With one occasion, in 18:21, the two expressions, respectively, ‘Babylon the great’, and ‘the great city’ emerge, becoming Babylon, the great city –Βαβυλὼν ἡ μεγάλη πόλις.

Especially considering the political dimension of the gendered complex, Beale points to an alternate translation of the adjective μεγάλη as ‘famous’, ‘notorious’, having influence (cf. vv.1-2).⁸⁹¹

Although Beale does not insist very much on this issue, it would be appropriate to add, such a translation is pertinent because Babylon has a notorious⁸⁹² fame in the Old Testament: it becomes the object of downfall (Gen 11, Psalm 137, Isa 13:21, 47, Jer 50-51);

⁸⁸⁸ Ruiz, *Ezekiel in the Apocalypse*, 236.

⁸⁸⁹ Vander Stichele, *Re-membering the Whore*, 109.

⁸⁹⁰ Sals, *Die Biographie*, 85. She carefully notes all the instances of this adjective featuring with auditions and visions: in the context of the millstone (18:21), the heavenly feast (19:17), the mountain upon which John looks (21:10), the wall of Jerusalem (21:12).

⁸⁹¹ Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 858.

⁸⁹² Räßle, *The Metaphor of the City*, 156.

sometimes it is a divine means itself (Jer 25:8-11.15-25, Ezek 24, Micah 4:10).⁸⁹³ As a result, Babylon became synonymous with opposition with God, being thus asserted a negative connotation associated with infidelity.

As a result, the name above may invite a clear reference to Dan 4:30.⁸⁹⁴ According to this text, the king Nebuchadnezzar is arrogantly attributing to himself the building of such a magnificent city and that constitutes a reason for divine judgment.

In this manner, the epithet *μεγάλη* does not bear any laudatory value. It is pregnant with irony, since Babylon's greatness is evident in what is despicable to God.

This type of irony operates like a red thread in the vision. It was previously detected with the Whore's posture. Also, it featured in the enumeration of expensive clothes and ornamentation against the very nature of the woman wearing them – a whore. In addition, such aspect can be detected in the turning of the tables concerning the demise of the Great Whore, as fulfillment of God's will.

Another interpretation of *μεγάλη* suggests that Babylon's greatness lies not in its notoriety, but it is "particularly her fall which is great (14:8, 18:2.10.16.19.21)."⁸⁹⁵

Considering my observations on the three dimensions of the Great Whore in Apocalypse 17, namely those of 'whore', 'woman' and 'city', an over-emphasis on the last of them has lead traditional approaches to the text towards a loss of content concerning the previous two.

As part of these approaches, references to the Great Whore though textually accurate were replaced by the ones pointing at 'Babylon the Great'. Feminist critical approaches were formulated in order to resist and correct such interpretations.

A variety of readings of the vision of Apocalypse 17 occurred⁸⁹⁶ trying to maintain the balance between the corporeal and the political dimension of the Great Whore. Usually, when references to the geopolitical entity predominate in the interpretation, gender issues fall into the background.

When the political implications of this title are emphasized, gender becomes a political expression, it becomes an ideological construct, "inflected by other relations of

⁸⁹³ Sals, *Die Biographie*, 84.

⁸⁹⁴ Kowalski, *Die Rezeption des Propheten Ezechiel*, 183; Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 858; cf. Ruiz, *Ezekiel in the Apocalypse*, 271; Osborne, *Revelation*, 612; Gordon Campbell, Antithetical Feminine Urban Imagery and a Tale of Two Women-Cities in the Book of Revelation, in: *Tyndale Bulletin* 55(1)/2004, 81-108, 86. Also cf. Labahn, 'Apokalyptische' Geographie, 127, (ft. 65).

⁸⁹⁵ Campbell, *Feminine Urban Imagery*, 87.

⁸⁹⁶ Cf. Part I (History of Research).

domination, such as race, status, religion and colonial imperialism,”⁸⁹⁷ so speaking about gender becomes synonymous with speaking of a structure of power, which leads ultimately to speaking against an oppressive structure of power.⁸⁹⁸

With the analysis of ‘Babylon’ as theological concept and motif throughout the Apocalypse, exhaustive studies support a one-to-one identification regarding *who* Babylon in the Apocalypse may allude to. Such endeavour, popular though, has failed to exhaust the potency of the signifier ‘Babylon’.

Additionally, studies on *why* this name is used and *how* it functions as well as *what* it entails have not met the extent of the popularity, those focused on decoding the identity of Babylon have.

Such interpretations range from historical to a-historical, from corporeal to immaterial, from literal to metaphorical.

The referents of ‘Babylon’ have been Rome, Jerusalem, the actual Babylon, or a more transhistorical-ethic representation of a *civitas diaboli* –the evil, immorality of every historical period.

Alternatively, when devoid of any geopolitical content, interpretations of Babylon the Great would revolve around corporeal identifications. They could even touch upon mythological content expressed in different depictions of Goddesses,⁸⁹⁹ absorbed in cosmic battles.

Historical interpretations opt either for an anti-Jewish or anti-Roman stance.⁹⁰⁰ While the majority of the contemporary influential exegetes prefer Rome⁹⁰¹ as the addressee of

⁸⁹⁷ Schüssler-Fiorenza, *The Power of the Word*, 132.

⁸⁹⁸ Cf. Stenström, *The Book of Revelation. A Vision of the Ultimate Liberation or the Ultimate Backlash?*, 1-61, cf. Vander Stichele, *Just a Whore*, 7.

⁸⁹⁹ To name a few, cf. Aune’s magisterial commentary, where the whore is a parody of Goddess Roma (*Revelation 17-22*, 919-928, also 937). Cf. for variations on the same motif Elizabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza’s reference to the ‘Great Mother Goddess’ in *Vision of a Just World*, 96f; or ‘Queen Ruler’ of David L. Barr, *Women in Myth and History: Deconstructing John’s Characterizations*, in: Amy Jill Levine, Maya Robbins (eds.), *A Feminist Companion to the Apocalypse of John*, 55-68, also Yarbrow Collins’s ‘Terrible Mother’ as per Feminine Symbolism in the Book of Revelation b, 121-130, Mary Ann Beavis, *Jezebel Speaks: Naming the Goddesses in the Book of Revelation*, in: Amy Jill Levine, Maya Robbins (eds.), *A Feminist Companion to the Apocalypse of John*, 131-146, cf. Paul Duff’s approach to the ‘Harlot Queen’, in: *Who Rides the Beast?*, 83-96.

⁹⁰⁰ G. Biguzzi, *Is the Babylon of Revelation Rome or Jerusalem?*, in: *Biblica*, 87/2006, 371-386, available at <http://www.bsw.org/Biblica/Vol-87-2006/Is-The-Babylon-Of-Revelation-Rome-Or-Jerusalem/111/article-p371.html> (last accessed 10.10. 2009).

John's writing, some other opt for Jerusalem,⁹⁰² stating that the book represents an anti-Jewish libel.

Others⁹⁰³ opt for a transhistorical dimension, rooted in another level of interpretation than the ones above. For them the text remains open to much more than an identification with the historical realities, referring either to Jerusalem or to Rome. They perceive Babylon as an embodiment of evil, going beyond the immediate historical context of the writing up of the Apocalypse. In doing so, they advocate the ambiguity of the city's ultimate symbolism of Babylon, thus its interpretation achieved timelessness.

As previously mentioned, some interpretations even take Babylon in its literal sense.⁹⁰⁴

With feminist critical concerns, interpretations focus on Babylon as both a corporeal image, having either a particular woman as referent, or the more abstract concept of 'woman' in general.

With the latter variant, interpretations tend towards an immaterial understanding of the image, based to various degrees on the different understandings of the theory of 'metaphor'.

With substitutionary⁹⁰⁵ approaches to interpreting Babylon the Great, the works of feminist theologians reflect an important contribution in the process of the correct reading of the name.

⁹⁰¹ For similar views cf. commentaries by Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, Charles, *Revelation*, Blount, *Revelation*, Prigent, *Commentary on the Apocalypse of St. John*, also the article of Frey, The Relevance of the Roman Imperial Cult.

Nevertheless, equating the interpretation of Babylon the Great with Rome poses two major problems for contemporary exegesis as emerging from the readers' response. On the one hand, in view of 1:1, this one-to-one correspondence denies the essential nature of the polyvalence of the apocalyptic language, together with its openness, indeterminacy and ambiguity. On the other hand, such an identification as the above usually neglects the emotional appeal of the metaphors.

⁹⁰² Lupieri, *A Commentary on the Apocalypse of John*; Massyngberde Ford, *Revelation*, 285; cf. Beagley, *The "Sitz im Leben" of the Apocalypse*.

⁹⁰³ Cf. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 859, also Leonard. L. Thompson, *Revelation* (Abingdon New Testament Commentaries) Nashville: Abingdon, 1998; Rissi *Die Verführung*.

⁹⁰⁴ This approach is especially prominent with some Neo-Protestant literal readings of the Apocalypse, which interpret 'Babylon' as the historical Babylon. For this interpretation cf. among others Steve Gregg (ed.), *Revelation: Four Views, a Parallel Commentary*, Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1997; Robert L. Thomas, *Revelation 8 to 22: An Exegetical Commentary*, Chicago: Moody Press, 1992; Charles H. Dyer, *The Identity of Babylon in Revelation 17 and 18* (Th.M. Thesis) Dallas: Dallas Theological Seminary, 1979; Andy Woods, *What is the Identity of Babylon in Revelation 17-18? My Hermeneutical Approach to Apocalyptic Literature*, available at <http://download.ebooks6.com/What-is-the-Identity-of-Babylon-in-Revelation-17-18-by-Andy-Woods-pdf-e105652.pdf> (no pagination), (last accessed 20.08.2011).

There are Biblical scholars and exegetes⁹⁰⁶ who cannot neglect or disregard the actual female characteristics of Babylon in 17:3-5. They argue that the generic identification of the Great Whore permeates the whole vision of Apocalypse 17.

A sensuous image of a woman, named after a city is not aleatory constructed. It aims at conveying a clear message and warns the readers of the imminent danger of succumbing to the charms of the figurative complex of woman/city.

Nevertheless, the strategy employed for this purpose is deeply entrenched in patriarchal society and imbibed with androcentric thought. The observations above represent the starting point and quality as initial assumptions for a feminist critique.

Excursus on female images as cities

This excursus has been prompted by the tradition of using feminine images to depict cities⁹⁰⁷ as well as the identification of these personifications with a particular type of female behaviour –whore, or whoring.

My argument is that the author merely receipts this already existing tradition in the Apocalypse.

As such, this reception is not problematic, but the gender-blindness attributed to it and perpetuated into the postmodern social theory has been criticized extensively by gender-informed scholarship triggering an exegesis with social implications.

By appealing to the OT city-whores tradition, it is generally assumed that John's writing alludes, or echoes the OT prophecies, but in a very original manner, pertinent to the current history of the author of the Apocalypse.⁹⁰⁸

⁹⁰⁵ This substitutionary approach draws on understanding metaphor as word-based: taking the word as its unit of reference and single-word figure of speech, a trope of resemblance can be attributed (Cf.

Ricoeur, *The Rule of Metaphor*, 3, also Moughtin-Mumby, *Sexual and Marital Metaphors*, 7).

⁹⁰⁶ Mary Wilson Carpenter, Representing Apocalypse: Sexual Politics and the Violence of Revelation, in: Richard Dellamora (ed.), *Postmodern Apocalypse: Theory and Cultural Practice at the End*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995, 107-135; Cf. Vander Stichele, Just a Whore. The Annihilation of Babylon According to Revelation 17:16 (no pagination) available at http://www.lectio.unibe.ch/00_1/j.htm (last accessed 24.06.2013), Rossing, *The Choice*, Pippin, *Apocalyptic Bodies*, also eadem, *Death and Desire*, also Tikva Frymer-Kensky, *Studies in Bible and Feminist Criticism*.

⁹⁰⁷ Cf. Sandra L. Gravett, Art. Female Images for Nations in Ezekiel, in: Carol Meyers, Ross Shepard Kraemer, Toni Craven (eds.), *Women in Scripture: A Dictionary of Named and Unnamed Women in the Hebrew Bible, the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books, and the New Testament*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002, 523-524, 523 and Brian Doyle, *The Apocalypse of Isaiah Metaphorically Speaking: a Study of the Use, Function and Significance of Metaphors in Isa 24-27*, Leuven: University Press, 2000, 225.

The frame in which such description operates is construed with the help of the nuptial imageries, and delineated by the *marriage metaphor*,⁹⁰⁹ nevertheless encompassing the politico-religious character.

The marriage metaphor draws extensively from human experience. It was and it is a regulated relationship in the organization of societies.

However, by appeal to the dynamics and knowledge of the social context within which it operated, one avoids creating a false consciousness, a distorted and retrodictive perception, by transposing contemporary ideas of marriage onto ancient assumptions. As a result, the importance of marriage should be analyzed in its anthropological context.

Wedding presupposes the existence of a covenant between the spouses. Any breach in the contract was understood in theological terms as adultery, and/or fornication.

The OT operates with feminine imagery either in biological terms or social roles. City personifications in the Hebrew Bible confer women diverse status designations: *virgin* (Gen 24:16, Judg 21:12, Esther 2, Joel 1:8), *mother* (Isa 50:1, Lam 1:5.16), whose sons and daughters are the inhabitants of the city (Isa 47:8-9, 54:13, Ezek 16:20, Judg 1:27, 2Sam 20:19), *wife* (certain individual cities acquire this status: Jerusalem –Ezek 16:8, 23:37, Samaria –Ezek 23:37, Zion –as ex-wife in Isa 50:1), *widow* (Isa 47:8-9, 54:4, Lam 1:1), *mistress/powerful woman* (Lam 1:1), *princess/ruler* (Lam 1:1). Pertaining here are the additional images of *being enthroned* (Jer 48:18) and *sovereign* (Micah 4:8), as well as *crowned* (Ezek 16:2), *captive* (Isa 52:2), *laborer* (Lam 1:1).⁹¹⁰

It contains generic markers: the masculine represents the divine, either God or the God-sent –the prophet, while the feminine denotes the human part, usually delineated by either by biological markers (mother, daughter) sexual ones (virgin, whore), or culturally assigned societal roles (mother, widow, bride).

Within the dynamics of this metaphor, the female part is always subordinate to the masculine⁹¹¹ and from a sexually-relevant perspective, “these images are inflexible in that

⁹⁰⁸ Cf. Christopher A. Frilingos, *Spectacles of the Empire. Monsters, Martyrs and the Book of Revelation*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004, 58. Also, Gregory K. Beale, *The Use of Daniel in Jewish Apocalyptic Literature and in the Revelation of St. John*, Lanham: University Press of America, 1984; Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy*; Moyise, *The Old Testament in the Book of Revelation*, idem, *The Language of the /Old Testament in the Apocalypse*, in: *Journal for the Study of New Testament* 76/1999, 97-113.

⁹⁰⁹ Mumby acknowledges the fact that the marriage metaphor unites sexual and marital metaphorical language (Mumby, *Sexual and Marital Metaphors*, 6). Cf. Zimmermann, *Geschlechtermetaphorik und Gottesverhältnis*, 404.

⁹¹⁰ Day, *The Personification of Cities*, 283-284.

⁹¹¹ Cf. Brenner, *Pornoprophecies*, 64.

they invariably reflect female sexuality as negative⁹¹² and male sexuality as neutral or positive.”⁹¹³

Besides generic undertones, the OT sexual and marital metaphorical language expresses usually a variety of aspects.

The referential spectrum of the metaphor includes themes such as foundation, nurture, protection, also exclusivity of the marriage relationship as mirroring God’s love, commitment, permanence and intimacy. By association with the marriage metaphor, another dimension unfolds, namely of the adultery, as betrayal of the wedding covenant. Fornication is also part of this semantic field.

As previously mentioned, it has a strong political character, as either referring to the Israelites as a nation, or to individual cities, to which the following attests:

*“In continuity with a long tradition of biblical and extrabiblical writings, the polis and the woman stand for human communities or groups, either in faithful relationship to God, or in rebellion and infidelity.”*⁹¹⁴

Judgmental values and attributes are associated with it. As a result, within this referential framework, adultery is often condemned, which implies the worship of foreign gods, antagonistic to YHWH, subsequently resulting into various degree of inappropriate participation in cultic practices, as initiated by the political alliances with foreign nations.⁹¹⁵

Subsequently, prostitution, as the chief act of a city depicts man’s rebellion against God and carries political implications and this is proven in the case of *Jerusalem* (Isa 1:21-31; Ezek 16, 23; Lam), respectively, *Sion* (Isa 48, Psalm 87), *Samaria* (Ez 16:46-61), *Babylon* (Psalm 137, Isa 47, cf. Rev 17-19), *Tyre* (Isa 23:15-18, Ez 27) and *Niniveh* (Nah 3), but also *Dibon* (Isa 15:2f, Jer 48:8), *Heshbon* (Isa 15:4), or *Sidon* (Isa 23:12).⁹¹⁶

The one pursuing the adulterous breach is the feminine counterpart, often termed as *harlot*. The prophets and other Biblical authors developed this further.⁹¹⁷ Any breach in the contract was understood in theological terms as adultery, and/or fornication.

⁹¹² I do not fully agree with the assumption that there is a negative display of the female sexuality throughout depictions of marriage metaphor, but I contend on its ambiguity: that is, female sexuality can be viewed as blessing by virtue of son production, and it can equally be perceived as negative, posing a threat. Cf. Phyllis Bird, *Images of the Women in the Old Testament*, in: Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Religion and Sexism*, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1974, 41-88, esp. 65.

⁹¹³ Brenner, *Pornoprophetics*, 63.

⁹¹⁴ Humphrey, *A Tale of Two Cities*, 83.

⁹¹⁵ Moughtin-Mumby, *Sexual and Marital Metaphors*, 1. Cf. Schüssler-Fiorenza, *The Power of the Word*, 135.

⁹¹⁶ The textual identifications stem from Sals, *Die Biographie*, 30.

⁹¹⁷ Doyle, *The Apocalypse of Isaiah Metaphorically Speaking*, 227.

Spousal infidelity is frequently used in Scripture to depict man's rebellion against God (Isa 1:21; Jer 2:20; Ezekiel 16; 23), harlotry is also used to personify individual cities, such as *Tyre* (Isa 23:16-17) and *Nineveh* (Nah 3:4), and *Jerusalem* (Ezek 16:30.35) that engaged in shameful practices revolving around idol worshipping.

From the above, it is obvious that the marriage metaphor includes references to corporeality as well as political, being in this way very close to the dimensions of the gendered character of the Great Whore in the Apocalypse.

However, the political aspects are deemed more important than the corporeal ones.⁹¹⁸

Among the corporeal references, sexual markers such as 'whore'/'whoring', 'prostitution', 'adultery', are frequently cited, in conjunction with 'punishment'.

However appealing could a comparison with the OT tradition may apparently be, a careful consideration is imposed: the marriage metaphor does not function for every of the cities mentioned (cf. Tyre, Nineveh and Babylon of the Apocalypse). Then, an additional problem is whether one can ascribe adultery the same value as fornication. Additionally, by contrast with the Apocalypse, the order in the prophetic book is reversed: whereas the city becomes personified, in the Apocalypse 17, the woman is equated with a city.

As disclaimer, I would like to stress the fact that the marriage metaphor is far more complex,⁹¹⁹ than in the following.

All these feature with the Great Whore, as resulting from the vision of Apocalypse 17.

However appealing could a comparison with the OT tradition may apparently be, a careful consideration is imposed: the marriage metaphor does not function for every of the cities mentioned (cf. Tyre, Nineveh and Babylon of the Apocalypse). Then, an additional problem is whether one can ascribe adultery the same value as fornication. Additionally, by contrast with the Apocalypse, the order in the prophetic book is reversed: whereas the city becomes personified, in the Apocalypse 17, the woman is equated with a city.

⁹¹⁸ For a detailed description cf. Schüssler-Fiorenza, *The Power of the Word*, 133-144, also Yarbrow Collins, *Feminine Symbolism in the Book of Revelation*, 27.

⁹¹⁹ It indeed comprises motifs of the 'city', but it also encompasses by means of feminine imagery, all associated commonplaces: allusions to Israel's punishment (cf. Hos 9:11.14.16, 13:13, Isa 13:16, 26:18, 32:4, 33:11, 47:9, Ezek 19:7, 22:25 Zech 14:2, Jer 13:33.26, 15:8.9, 18:21, 22:26, 38:22-34, 41:10, 50:12, Nah 3:5), condemning enemies (Isa 19:16, Nah 3:13, Jer 48:41, 49:22, 50:37 cf. 51:30), but also images of restoration (Jer 30:6, cf. Isa 31:13, 49:18, 21, 54:1, 60:16), as well as various blessings (Isa 62:4.5, 66:7.8.9.11-12). For every item mentioned, refer the analytical enterprise by Alice Laffey, *Wives, Harlots and Concubines. The Old Testament in Feminist Perspective*, London: SPK, 1990, especially pgs. 160-165.

Mother of Whores

Babylon is not just “the great prostitute” (17:1; 19:2) –ἡ πόρνη ἡ μεγάλη ‘the mother of prostitutes’ (17:5) –ἡ μήτηρ τῶν πορνῶν. Not only is she mother of prostitutes, but also, by extension ‘[the mother] of the abominations on earth’ –[ἡ μήτηρ] τῶν βδελυγμάτων τῆς γῆς.

Now, as presented in the earlier verse, the category that of abominations –βδέλυγματα circumscribes perfectly the cultic aspect, namely idol worshipping, while the former category of whores –τῶν πορνῶν points to a type sexually promiscuous behaviour.

The image of the Great Whore contains therefore a motherly dimension, applicable to women in general, but also entails associations with promiscuous behaviour. In view of the associations and the phrasing of the horrendous name, μήτηρ purports a negative connotation.

Nevertheless, despite the negative substance, ‘mother of whores’ is the only textually mentioned ‘mother’ in the Apocalypse.

There are basically several variants of translating the possessive ‘of whores’ –τῶν πορνῶν. Grammatically, it can be derived from the noun πόρνη having the genitive form τῶν πορνῶν, but it can also be derived from the masculine noun πόρνος having the genitive τῶν πόρνων.⁹²⁰

Charles⁹²¹ suggests a third variant of the genitive as found in the expression in the misreading of the Hebrew מִן־אִמִּי which, in this case would read as mother ‘of harlotries’ –τῶν πορνειῶν derived from the noun πορνεία, respectively ‘fornication’.⁹²²

A reference of Cornelius Tacitus (*The Annals*. 15.44) to Rome as the city “where all things hideous and shameful from every part of the world find their centre and become popular”⁹²³ is frequently quoted.

In addition to that, in a text without accents, the genitive can have three readings: ‘mother of female prostitutes’ (πόρνη) and/or ‘mother of male prostitutes’ (πόρνος) in particular or, ‘of fornicators’⁹²⁴ in general.

⁹²⁰ Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, 420; Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 909.

⁹²¹ Charles, *Revelation 2*: 62, 65; cf. Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 909, Ruiz, *Ezekiel in the Apocalypse*, 335, ft. 81. Featuring with the Latin versions and commentaries of Primasius and Beatus, the Greek ἡ μήτηρ τῶν πορνῶν becomes *mater fornicationum*, paralleling τῶν βδελυγμάτων with the rendition ‘*abominationum*’. Ruiz enumerates among others Heinrich Kraft, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes* (Handbuch zum Neuen Testament 16a), Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1974, 212, also 215 whose preference for this option in translation is also considered to suit better the context, for it matches πορνεία in 17.4.

⁹²² Also cf. Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, 420f.

⁹²³ The Latin text reads “sed per urbem etiam, quo cuncta undique atrociora aut pudenda confluent celebranturque”.

I find the first variant to be most convincing and in full concordance with the text, as well as supported by references from the OT background as following.

Firstly, the OT intertextual references show that this association of ‘mother’ and ‘whore’ were relevant metaphorically in a gendered form. Hos 2:5.7 (cf. Isa 50:1) refers to Israel in terms of ‘a mother playing the whore’ – אִמִּי הָיָה זְנוּנָה.

Secondly, in terms of being a ‘mother of harlots’, Ezek 16:43-45 records the generic manner in which Yahweh speaks of the lewdness of Israel, quoting the proverb “Like mother like daughter” in Ezek 16:44. Similarly, Hosea names the children of such a woman ‘children of harlotry’ – τέκνα πορνείας (Hos 2:6, cf. 1:2).

Given this reference to the Great Whore as ‘mother’ is apparently an act of “textual injustice” with regard to the woman of chapter 12 –the one and only *de facto* mother of the Apocalypse. The injustice can be removed however, when the gendered characters in question are evaluated in the context in which they feature, as it will be the case at a later point.

Methodically, I will pursue a contrast and a comparison with other gendered characters in the Apocalypse.

The feminine trait of ‘mother’ is the main criterion of the comparison. As a result, I will elaborate on the contrast with the ‘mother’ of chapter 12, the Woman Clothed with the Sun, which Corrington Streete perceives as “perhaps a resexualized version of the Bride, now married and pregnant.”⁹²⁵

My argument focuses on the fact that John employs similar compositional motifs in describing the first pair of mothers.

This similarity between Rev 12 and Rev 17 is supplemented by thematic correlations⁹²⁶ to Jezebel, the self-proclaimed prophetess and her children (2:20-23).

The textual relationship with the latter will also be exploited also in tabular form in the following, in order to underscore the similitudes better.

The contrast between the two different visions in the Apocalypse clearly highlights to various degrees the clear distinction between the two ‘mothers’.

⁹²⁴ Humphrey argues with little conviction on the possibility of reading πορνῶν as either male or female (Edith McEwan Humphrey, *The Ladies and the Cities: Transformation and Apocalyptic Identity in Joseph and Aseneth, 4 Ezra, the Apocalypse and the Shepherd of Hermas* (Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha Supplement Series 17), Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995, 108; cf. Lupieri, *A Commentary on the Apocalypse of John*, 264.

⁹²⁵ Gail Corrington Streete, *The Strange Woman. Power and Sex in the Bible*, Louisville: Westminster Press, 1997, 149. Contra Zimmermann, *Geschlechtermetaphorik und Gottesverhältnis*, 425. He considers that although such a perception interrupts the linearity of the chronological time in the Apocalypse, a direct connection of the Bride of the Lamb (Rev 19) to the Woman in Rev 12 is improbable.

⁹²⁶ Cf. Räßle, *The Metaphor of the City*, 102-103.

The table below will provide a better visual aid in serving the purposes of contrast and comparison between Rev 12 and Rev 17.⁹²⁷

Table 4

Woman of Rev 12	Woman of Rev 17
σημεῖον –sign [...] ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ –in heaven	μυστήριον –mystery [...] εἰς ἔρημον –in the desert (Earth)
περιβεβλημένη τὸν ἥλιον, καὶ ἡ σελήνη ὑποκάτω τῶν ποδῶν αὐτῆς, καὶ ἐπὶ τῆς κεφαλῆς αὐτῆς στέφανος ἀστέρων δώδεκα Clothed with the sun (v.1)	περιβεβλημένη πορφυροῦν καὶ κόκκινον, κεχρυσωμένη χρυσίῳ καὶ λίθῳ τιμίῳ καὶ μαργαρίταις Clothed in purple and scarlet, adorned with gold, jewels and pearls (v.4)
δράκων μέγας πυρρός, ἔχων κεφαλὰς ἑπτὰ καὶ κέρατα δέκα καὶ ἐπὶ τὰς κεφαλὰς αὐτοῦ ἑπτὰ διαδήματα Potentially under attack by red, great dragon with seven heads and ten horns (v.3.4)	καθήμενην ἐπὶ θηρίον κόκκινον, γέμον[τα] ὀνόματα βλασφημίας, ἔχων κεφαλὰς ἑπτὰ καὶ κέρατα δέκα Seated on a scarlet beast with seven heads and ten horns (v.3)
δράκων ἔστηκεν ἐνώπιον τῆς γυναικὸς τῆς μελλούσης τεκεῖν, ἵνα ὅταν τέκη τὸ τέκνον αὐτῆς καταφάγη Dragon attempts to devour her child (v. 4)	καὶ τὰ δέκα κέρατα ἃ εἶδες καὶ τὸ θηρίον, οὗτοι μισήσουσιν τὴν πόρνην, καὶ ἡρημωμένην ποιήσουσιν αὐτήν καὶ γυμνήν, καὶ τὰς σάρκας αὐτῆς φάγονται, καὶ αὐτήν κατακαύσουσιν ἐν πυρί· Woman is devoured by beast (and the kings) (v.16)
καὶ ἔτεκεν υἱόν, ἄρσεν, ὃς μέλλει ποιμαίνειν πάντα τὰ ἔθνη ἐν ῥάβδῳ σιδηρᾷ By virtue of her giving birth she becomes mother of a son who is to rule all nations (v.5)	ἡ μήτηρ τῶν πορνῶν καὶ τῶν βδελυγμάτων τῆς γῆς Mother of whores and earth's abominations (v.5)
καὶ ἐδόθησαν τῇ γυναικὶ αἱ δύο πτέρυγες τοῦ ἀετοῦ τοῦ μεγάλου, ἵνα πέτηται εἰς τὴν ἔρημον εἰς τὸν τόπον αὐτῆς Fled into wilderness (v.14)	εἰς ἔρημον ἐν πνεύματι. καὶ εἶδον γυναῖκα Is already in the wilderness (v.3)
ὕδωρ ὡς ποταμόν, ἵνα αὐτήν ποταμοφόρητον ποιήσῃ Threatened by water like a river (v.15)	καθήμενης ἐπὶ ὑδάτων πολλῶν Seated on many waters (v.1)
Protected by God from the dragon (vv. 6:14-16)	ὁ γὰρ θεὸς ἔδωκεν εἰς τὰς καρδίας αὐτῶν ποιῆσαι τὴν γνώμην αὐτοῦ Killed by the beast (and the kings) according to the purposes of God (vv.16-17)

⁹²⁷ Cf. Mitchell G. Reddish, *Revelation* (Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary), Macon: Smyth & Helwys, 2001, 335.

Although placed in a similar context informed by visionary experience, the actual setting of the two characters differs: the apparition of chapter 12 is situated in heaven, the other one is localized on earth.

Besides the importance of the contrast between a 'heavenly' and an 'earthly' woman, such a differentiation points to their nature in terms of heirs: the 'heavenly' woman gives birth to Messiah, whereas the 'earthly' to unfaithful inhabitants of the earth, who easily indulge in earthly pleasures.

The apparition of the two gendered protagonists is marked each time interestingly. While the pregnant woman in chapter 12:1 occurs as a great sign –σημεῖον, the woman in 17:5 is strongly marked by mystery –μυστήριον. Whereas one's apparition is overt, unveiled, the other's is unclear, maybe even deceiving. As such, the Great Whore's apparition requires divine aid in understanding.

A clear contrast between the dress and ornamentation of the woman in 12 is configured as opposing the gaudy attire and adornment of the Whore.

Additionally, the association with astral bodies gives the grandeur of the apparition in chapter 12.

In contrast, the greatness of the gendered apparition in Rev 17 is relevant in her promiscuity, a fact amply certified in her presentation.

With both apparitions, animals with similar characteristics feature: a red Dragon and a Beast.

While the Dragon is awaiting to devour the child about to be born, the Beast in chapter 17 is submissive to the Whore. The animals are thus placed on the Apocalypse's perpetrators side.

Although different, the Beasts are ultimately identified in terms of their destructive nature: one devours (Rev 12), the other dismembers (Rev 17).

However, their role in the apocalyptic scenario is different: in the introduction, the Dragon of chapter 12 is depicted as active, while the Beast is passive. As the rising action unfolds, their role changes as Michael will defeat the dragon and throw it to Earth. In addition, chapter 17 narrates of a riot against the Whore in 17:16, in which the Beast plays an active role.

The Whore of chapter 17 is labeled 'mother'. She is diametrically opposed to the actual mother of the Apocalypse. Although not named 'mother', the gendered apparition in Rev 12 is "described in the process of giving birth –the maternal act *par excellence*."⁹²⁸

Despite the terminology, the Great Whore does not generate 'a son, a male child, who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron' –υἱὸν ἄρσεν, ὃς μέλλει ποιμαίνειν πάντα τὰ ἔθνη ἐν ῥάβδῳ σιδηρᾷ (12:5). Nor is she mother of 'the rest of her offspring, who keep the commandments of God and hold the testimony of Jesus' –τῶν λοιπῶν τοῦ σπέρματος αὐτῆς τῶν τηρούντων τὰς ἐντολὰς τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ ἔχόντων τὴν μαρτυρίαν Ἰησοῦ (12:17).

The Great Whore is biologically linked to 'whores and earth's abominations' –τῶν πορνῶν καὶ τῶν βδελυγμάτων τῆς γῆς (17:5).

Lupieri marks the interesting contrast between the male son of the Woman Clothed with the Sun and assumingly the daughters of the Great Whore, respectively prostitutes. Depending on how one reads πορνῶν, it remains valid that an association with femininity was considered in some Gnostic circles "a sign of imperfection and negativity."⁹²⁹

The woman of chapter 12 finds refuge in the desert, as God offers there protection. Her counterpart in chapter 17 is condemned by God by means of a *double entendre* –the vision is located in the desert, where she will be made desolate –ἡρημωμένην (17:16).

In addition, another natural element functions similarly, namely 'water'.⁹³⁰ The Woman Clothed with the Sun is menaced by water, whereas 'water' represents the seat, the abode the Whore in 17:1, since she is introduced as καθημένη ἐπὶ ὑδάτων πολλῶν.

The presentation above has made it very clear that the motifs pertaining to the textual construction of the images of the two gendered characters are antithetical, to the point Paul Duff names the two gendered characters in the Apocalypse "contrasting feminine paradigms".⁹³¹

⁹²⁸ Duff, *Who Rides the Beast?*, 70.

⁹²⁹ Lupieri, *A Commentary on the Apocalypse of John*, 264.

⁹³⁰ Regarding chapter 17, I would like to make a small amendment: water will be destructive even to Babylon, as the reference in 18:21 testifies: "Then a mighty angel took up a stone like a great millstone and threw it into the sea, saying, "With such violence Babylon the great city will be thrown down, and will be found no more."

⁹³¹ Duff, *Who Rides the Beast?*, 71; cf. Gordon Campbell, Antithetical Feminine-Urban Imagery and a Tale of Two Women-Cities in the Book of Revelation, in: *Tyndale Bulletin* 55(1)/ 2004, 81-108, 90. The Seer pictures the Whore intentionally as a reflection of the celestial woman. Contra Prigent, who does not contest such a resemblance, but he doubts its relevance for his exegetical analysis (Prigent, *Commentary on the Apocalypse of St. John*, 489).

From a sociological perspective, motherhood is a positive trait of a woman, being highly appreciated in the Ancient Near East. In view of the previous, “a childless woman was a failure, someone who had apparently committed some sin or at least been judged unworthy of bearing a child. This all her life was an agony of humiliation (Gen 16:4, 1 Sam 1:6).”⁹³²

Martha T. Roth mentions a cultural assumption that prostitutes would remain childless (or at least without natural heirs).⁹³³ Therefore, prostitution would be perceived as menacing, for a woman without children is evaluated negatively (cf. Isa 59:21, 54:1).⁹³⁴

Another reference to motherhood in the Apocalypse features with Jezebel of Rev 2:20.

In the same context, the extension of the gendered metaphor to the other named woman of the Apocalypse could be achieved. Jezebel’s characterization is full with sexual markers, to which Babylon strongly resembles.

In the Apocalypse, the cognomen *Ιεζαβελ* is a ‘recycled’ version of King Ahab’s Phoenician wife customarily associated with forcefully admitting to and promoting immorality and idolatry⁹³⁵ in Israel (1 Kgs 16:31; 2 Kgs 9:22), as well as killing the prophets of Yahweh (1 Kgs 18: 4.13).⁹³⁶

With Jezebel in the Apocalypse, John makes only subliminal use of any notion of usurpation of power. Such a fact is only implied by her leading position as prophetess in the community of Thyatira.⁹³⁷ The social political dimension of image is however outweighed by that regarding her sexuality.

In view of the above abhorring associations, Jezebel in the Apocalypse is currently ‘tolerated’ among inhabitants of Thyatira.⁹³⁸

As a result, the self-entitled prophetess shows an array of traits, very similar to the *ἡ μήτηρ τῶν πορνῶν*, this time not by focusing primarily on the essence of “motherhood”, but that of ‘whore’ and her “whore-generating” capacity.

Jezebel is placed within the Apocalypse in the context of the accusations against idol worshipping, defined as a teaching to ‘practice fornication’ (*πορνεῦσαι*) by ‘eating food sacrificed to idols’ (*φαγεῖν εἰδωλόθυτα*).

⁹³² John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah. Chapters 40-66* (The New International Commentary on the Old Testament) Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1998, 418.

⁹³³ Martha T. Roth, Marriage, Divorce and the Prostitute in Ancient Mesopotamia, in: Christopher A. Faraone and Laura K. McClure (eds.), *Prostitutes and Courtesans in Ancient World*, 21-39, 32.

⁹³⁴ Sharon Moughtin-Mumby, *Sexual and Marital Metaphors*, 153.

⁹³⁵ Allen C Myers, art. ‘Asherah’, in: *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*, 112-113, 113.

⁹³⁶ Trebilco, *The Early Christians in Ephesus*, 317.

⁹³⁷ Cf. Barr, Jezebel’s Skinny Legs.

⁹³⁸ Tavo, *Woman, Mother and Bride*, 115 (ft.246).

Table 5

Jezebel (Rev 2, cf. 1 Kgs 16:31-19:3, 21, 2 Kgs 9: 4-37)	Whore (Rev 17-18)
Gendered identification: Woman (2: 20)	Gendered identification: Woman (17:3.4.6.9.18)
Her cognomen brings to mind negative associations from Israel's past. Remembered for many harlotries and sorceries –αἱ πορνεῖαι καὶ τὰ φάρμακα αὐτῆς τὰ πολλά (2 Kgs 9:22) as well as for killing the prophets (2 Kgs 9:7).	Her name is pregnant with negative associations Responsible for killing the witnesses to Jesus (17:6), as well as killing the prophets and saints (18:24). Her faults are similar, being subsequently explicated in Rev 17:1-3, 18:23, 18 overall.
The accusation of fornication in two variants (2:20.21) mentions fornication –πορνεία (2:22) and μοιχεία–adultery. These are constant throughout the maledictions John casts upon her.	Cognates of πόρνη are omnipresent with her description in 17:1.2.4.5.15.16, 18:3.9, 19:2.
Claims herself as 'prophetess' –προφῆτις (2:20), but is a nothing but a whore (2: 21.22 cf. 2:20, her chief activity is to entice into committing acts of immorality). Cf. Jezebel's royal status in Kgs.	Claims herself 'queen' –βασίλισσα (18:7) but is nothing but a whore (17:1.5.15.16, 19:2).
By virtue of her actions, she is deemed as inappropriate mother to her children. Her children/followers –τέκνα αὐτῆς (2:23) are most probably God's servants of 2:20 –τοὺς ἐμούς δούλους. Her children will be stricken dead (2:23).	By the use of the appellative 'mother' –μήτηρ, her children are identified in 17:6 as 'whores' –πόρναι. By extension, the same appellative could be applied to the different groups (inhabitants of the earth, kings, merchants etc.), with whom the Whore-mother associates. Through her "whore-generating" capacity, her associates will be eventually punished in 19:17-18. 20-21.
She will be put to death (with time for repentance for her fornication –πορνεία (2:21)) by throwing her on a bed –βάλλω αὐτήν εἰς κλίνην (2:22).	The Whore will be punished (no time for repentance mentioned) by making her desolate and naked; they [the kings and the Beast] will devour her flesh and burn her up with fire –ἡρμηωμένην ποιήσουσιν αὐτήν καὶ γυμνήν καὶ τὰς σάρκας αὐτῆς φάγονται καὶ αὐτήν κατακαύσουσιν ἐν πυρί. (17:16)
Chief activities: διδάσκει καὶ πλανᾷ –teaching and beguiling* (2:20) *(sexual connotation)	Chief activities: committing fornication, ἐπόρνευσαν οἱ βασιλεῖς τῆς γῆς (17:2), deceiving by sorcery –ἐν τῇ φαρμακείᾳ σου ἐπλανήθησαν (18:23) which is semantically closely related with inebriating the inhabitants of the earth –ἐμεθύσθησαν οἱ κατοικοῦντες τὴν γῆν (17:2).
Consequences of her actions are connected with death: eating food sacrificed to idols –πορνεῦσαι καὶ φαγεῖν εἰδωλόθυτα (2:20).	Consequences of her actions are connected with death: Drinking blood –μεθύουσιν ἐκ τοῦ αἵματος (17:6).

The comparison above evidences how close in register are the designations for the two gendered images.

Parallel images, even parallel words are used to describe Jezebel and Babylon, the Great Whore. "John ties 'Babylon' and 'Jezebel' closely together so that in the reader's minds they are virtually equivalent,"⁹³⁹ making Jezebel "a prototype of Babylon-the-Whore".⁹⁴⁰

The following observation can be drawn from the table above: both characters are gendered. They are referred to as 'women', encompassing thus the corporeal dimension in their presentation, however to different extents and purposes.

Additionally, Jezebel and the Great Whore's names equally bring to minds of the readers negative associations from Israel's past.⁹⁴¹ They both recall different episodes of Israel's idolatrous corruption.⁹⁴²

Such a fact contributes further to their labeling as enemies of God. Although Jezebel is in no way responsible for the material killings of God's followers, in the way that the original Jezebel and the apocalyptic Babylon are, she is still responsible for their spiritual killing, by means of her teaching and deceiving.

Another element that connects the two gendered characters lists committing acts of sexual indiscretion, either explicitly or implicitly.

The information in the table above rests much on the assumption that Jezebel in the Apocalypse is a composite character emulating the Phoenician queen in the OT, even if with the original Jezebel, sexual accusations are not recorded, though Jehu speaks of her "harlotries and sorceries" (2 Kgs 9:22). These become part of her image via tradition⁹⁴³ and are transferred completely onto the Jezebel of the Apocalypse.⁹⁴⁴ As a result, accusations of fornication – πορνεία and adultery – μοιχεία feature with Jezebel of Rev 2.

In the case of the Great Whore, cognates of πορν- are defining. These strengthen the chief-aspect in her characterization.

Regarding the accusations of sexual nature, their functions differ. The original Jezebel is deemed 'whore' is because she worshipped foreign deities. Jezebel of the Apocalypse, because she is a whore, she engages into practices of fornication and adultery. There are two aspects of prostitution involved: one deals with a cultic dimension, whereas with Rev 2, the corporeal aspect is added to the cultic one.

⁹³⁹ Duff, *Who Rides the Beast?*, 92. Cf. Thompson, *Revelation*, 180.

⁹⁴⁰ Campbell, *Antithetical Feminine Urban Imagery*, 84. Cf. Stenström, *The Book of Revelation. A Vision of the Ultimate Liberation or the Ultimate Backlash?*, 90.

⁹⁴¹ Duff, *Wolves in Sheep's Clothing*, 75. Also cf. Duff, *Who Rides the Beast?*, 91.

⁹⁴² Lupieri, *A Commentary on the Apocalypse of John*, 224.

⁹⁴³ Duff, *Who Rides the Beast?*, 90.

⁹⁴⁴ Cf. Barr, *Jezebel's Skinny Legs*.

Jezebel and the Great Whore are characters that enjoy certain visibility within the apocalyptic scenario. They are publicly active and to various extents (one local, the other more universal)⁹⁴⁵ influential. However, their statuses are not universally acknowledged, although both ascribe titles to them: Jezebel names herself 'prophetess', while the Great Whore self-entitles 'queen'.

Clearly, the woman in Thyatira is not a queen, inasmuch as Jezebel in Kgs was neither a prophet, nor a teacher. "What fuses them is that both women constitute a threat."⁹⁴⁶

Possibly, the high status of the prophetess may imply wealth, and so, the discourse against Jezebel in Rev 2 may be part of John's critique of wealth.⁹⁴⁷ This could be also valid for Babylon: her clothes and ornamentation are diametrically opposed to the overall ascetic character of the Apocalypse.

The overconfident Babylon of Rev 18 is not in actuality a queen –although her attire is fit for one – but a prostitute, cosmically threatening in her role.

Moreover, Jezebel's activity of leading astray, beguiling into idolatry and adultery (2:20) features also with the Great Whore's chief maneuvers (18:23). In this manner, they are placed in the larger context of the actions delineating in the Apocalypse, Satan (12:9, 20:3.8.10) and its false prophet (13:14, 19:20).⁹⁴⁸

In an essentialist fashion, John views his characters, both Jezebel and the Great Whore as 'mothers' in a most inappropriate manner.

Even if motherhood conjugates with hope and future, theirs is denied in different ways: Jezebel's via the killing of her children (2:23) and Babylon's via the annulment of "the possibility of the future, envisioned as the marriage between the bridegroom and the bride (18:21-24)."⁹⁴⁹

Trebilco conceives Jezebel's motherhood in terms of the relationship between teacher and disciples,⁹⁵⁰ where her 'children' are in actuality her followers.⁹⁵¹ The same is valid for the Great Whore.

⁹⁴⁵ Thompson, *Revelation*, 90, 108, cf. Stenström, *The Book of Revelation. A Vision of the Ultimate Liberation or the Ultimate Backlash?*, 90.

⁹⁴⁶ Thimmes, *Teaching and Beguiling My Servants*, 81.

⁹⁴⁷ Schüssler-Fiorenza, *Vision of a Just World*, 134, cf. Trebilco, *The Early Christians in Ephesus*, 317, ft. 109.

⁹⁴⁸ Tavo, *Woman, Mother and Bride*, 115, (ft. 247); Campbell, *Antithetical Feminine Urban Imagery*, 84.

⁹⁴⁹ Räßple, *The Metaphor of the City*, 102.

⁹⁵⁰ Trebilco, *The Early Christians in Ephesus*, 542.

⁹⁵¹ Ranko Stefanović, *Revelation of Jesus Christ: Commentary on the Book of Revelation*, Berrien Springs: Andrews University Press, 2002, 129.

Their associates will be surely punished: the Whore's as depicted in 19:17-18. 20-21, and Jezebel's, nominalized as "rest of you in Thyatira, who do not hold this teaching" (2:24) will be broken like earthen pots (2:27).

All these considered, Jezebel and the Whore's violent demises are common. With or without time for repentance,⁹⁵² their punishment is certain: while Jezebel will be thrown on a sickbed⁹⁵³ (2:22) –probably implying that "she will be sick and will not recover, because she is under judgment"⁹⁵⁴ –the Great Whore will be déshabillée and her flesh will be devoured, being concomitantly burnt with fire (17:16).

Reasons for such extreme measures are based of course on the accusations mentioned above: teaching and deceiving⁹⁵⁵ in Jezebel's case and impious acts, deceiving by means of sorcery⁹⁵⁶ (18:23), as well as possible allusions to persecutions in the Whore's case.

Additionally, there is one point to be elaborated on, with reference to the relationship between gender and eating and drinking, abundantly documented in anthropological

⁹⁵² Trebilco suggests the 'time to repent' as depicting a history of conflict between himself and Jezebel (Trebilco, *The Early Christians in Ephesus*, 543).

⁹⁵³ Although the Greek records the noun 'κλίνη' (2:22) translated as 'bed', in the Biblical account, this noun connects two semantic fields.

The first is prompted by the sexualized language linked with the previous accusations revolving around fornication and adultery, accomplishing thus a "graphic allusion, leaving much to the imagination, that translators tried to defuse the rhetoric" (Thimmes, *Teaching and Beguiling My Servants*, 74 (ft. 24)). Cf. Beavis, *Jezebel Speaks*, 143 (ft. 51). By virtue of what immediately follows, namely "those who have committed adultery with her", Corrington Streete does not accept the translation 'sickbed' (Corrington Streete, *The Strange Woman*, 154).

Another interpretative option completes the previous, informed the context of punishment. As the *Eerdmans Dictionary* shows, the bed was used as "a figurative expression for death (cf. Job 17:13, Psalm 139:8)" (John S. Hammett, art. 'Bed', in: *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*, 159-160, 159).

For the translator's variants, cf. Harrington, *Revelation*, 63 – 'bed of pain' and – 'coffin' Lupieri, *A Commentary on the Apocalypse of John*, 123. Also cf. Eugenio Corsini, *The Apocalypse: The Perennial Revelation of Jesus Christ* (Good News Studies 5) (trans. and edited by Francis J. Moloney, S.D.B.), Wilmington: Michael Glazer, 1983.

⁹⁵⁴ Trebilco, *The Early Christians in Ephesus*, 317, (ft. 110).

⁹⁵⁵ In keeping up with Jezebel's accusations overloaded with sexual connotations, the verb πλανάω is translated in this instance as 'to beguile', although *Apocalypse* (English) translations note other variants such as 'to deceive', 'to lead astray'. Also cf. other options including 'to lure', 'to mislead' as well as 'to seduce' (Thimmes, *Teaching and Beguiling My Servants*, 83, 84 (ft. 60)).

⁹⁵⁶ For the ambivalence of the word φαρμακεία used with explicating the content of the Whore's cup, cf. the analysis of the previous verse.

studies. This phenomenon seems to imply references to boundary issues⁹⁵⁷ and purity-related⁹⁵⁸ concerns.

Evaluated as transgressions, unlawful, lustful eating and drinking are dangerous. They bring about death especially when coupled with πορνεία⁹⁵⁹: in Jezebel's case, eating food scarified to idols alienates the members of the community from God, while with the Great Whore, drinking abuse has robbed the inhabitants of the earth of their senses, which eventually led to them following the Whore, and so alienating from God.

In view of the above, death is the major consequence of associating with the two gendered characters. Their resemblance in terms of textual construction and motifs operates as warning the readers off their toxic lures.

Summary

Both characters in Table 5 display similarities in their standardized depiction as enemies of God. These similarities include references to their impious and devastating activities oriented on the people of God, paired with a generic identification, i.e. woman.

From the above parallel, it is obvious that through a deliberate choice of naming, by evidencing "the analogies between classic situations in Israel's past and their own situations", readers "are called upon to think typologically".⁹⁶⁰

In addition, Jezebel and the Great Whore's symbolic names contribute precisely to their textual control. Their names establish boundaries and polarities.⁹⁶¹ John actually controls the manner in which readers interpret their characters overall.

It was established that Jezebel corresponds minutely to the Great Whore. Although the latter's influence is devastating, Jezebel's scale of evil is significantly inferior when compared to the Whore's.

Their heinous influence stems from their status. This influence is materialized not only in power, authority but also wealth.

Such issues are discussed on several occasions in the Apocalypse, being condemned throughout the book, if not of a divine nature.

⁹⁵⁷ Thimmes, *Teaching and Beguiling My Servants*, 84.

⁹⁵⁸ Marshall, *Gender and Empire*, 24f.

⁹⁵⁹ Duff, *Who Rides the Beast?*, 94.

⁹⁶⁰ Yarbrow Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis*, 147.

⁹⁶¹ Thimmes, *Women Reading Women in the Apocalypse*, 136.

However, their status is actually a hoax, for Jezebel and the Great Whore are not what they themselves preach: they are neither a *real* prophetess, nor a queen. They arrogate unjustly such titles upon them. As a result, their statuses are not acknowledged outside their intimate group of followers.

Next, Jezebel and the Great Whore's motherly essence was brought into discussion. The analysis revealed their maternal inappropriateness. The relationship with the offsprings they produce is seriously jeopardized. The lack of future for both's offspring comes naturally as a result of divine punishment.

Because for this study, incursions into the *why* and *how* of the image of the Great Whore in the Apocalypse are required, some exegetes include the parallel between Jezebel and the Great Whore in John's rhetoric of conflict.⁹⁶²

As a result, this strategy denotes "the language or narrative strategies of persuasion and exhortation used to influence outcomes". It includes "expressions like speech as competition, speech as violence, speech as control, speech as exclusion, speech as blame". The strategy is "propagandistic and intertwined with gender, relationships, sociocultural and theological boundaries, authority, power and prestige (or status)".⁹⁶³

This manner of contrasting matches well John's apocalyptic dynamic of rendering the powerful powerless.⁹⁶⁴

Considering the above delineation, one can ascertain that such literary approach applies to Jezebel, in the same measure it applies to the Great Whore.

Along the comparative scheme above, name-calling features as part of the denunciatory practice in which activities such as deceiving, sexual promiscuousness, and eating/drinking impurities, i.e. food sacrificed to idols and blood rank high.

Additional aspects pertaining to the above definition were touched upon previously.

Underlying purity issues are applied argumentatively to both of them. It is not therefore the first time, when 'purity' as theme features. It was mentioned previously also with the contrast between the Bride and the Great Whore's garments and ornaments.

Similarly, in virtue of similar sexually promiscuous actions as emerging from the textual depiction, the Great Whore and Jezebel are impure. With their depictions, the language remains fully anchored in the human. This aspect is not applicable with depictions of New Jerusalem and the Woman Clothed with the Sun. With the latter, although the language

⁹⁶² Thimmes, *Teaching and Beguiling My Servants*, 77-82. Cf. Thompson, *Revelation*, 12.

⁹⁶³ Thimmes, *Teaching and Beguiling My Servants*, 77f.

⁹⁶⁴ Corrington Streete, *The Strange Woman*, 158.

initially delineates the human realm of emotions, it “quickly dissolves into the non-human.”⁹⁶⁵

Jezebel and Babylon could equally be examined in their communitarian feature. They become “a warning signal that any community, whose members deviate from Christian values, whose members contest God as Lord, the Almighty, will become Babylon.”⁹⁶⁶

Mother. Further Interpretational Options

When delineating the complex apposition describing ‘Babylon the Great’, ‘mother’ could also entail a figurative extension, that of ‘archetype’.⁹⁶⁷

In the same line of ideas, Bergmeier⁹⁶⁸ opts for the German compositum ‘Erzhure’ – archwhore, when describing the Great Whore’s essence as described in v.5.

Accordingly, μήτηρ would imply ‘fountainhead’, or ‘reservoir’.

Another reading of μήτηρ is also suggested by Aune. According to him, the noun can have “in the superlative sense [the] meaning [of] ‘the most depraved whore’ ”⁹⁶⁹ who “spreads her scandalous influence throughout the world.”⁹⁷⁰

Nevertheless, the genitive construction contains much more than a simple reference to gender.⁹⁷¹ It is most probably a classificatory term denoting the ones who are not allowed in the New Jerusalem (21:8, 22:15).

In this respect, the rejected ones –οἱ πόρνοι cannot be but impure, a category which transcends gender in the Apocalypse and belongs to the cultic sphere, to which several links were by now established.

While remaining in the same collective register, μήτηρ could also stand topologically for a community.

⁹⁶⁵ Corrington Streete, *The Strange Woman*, 149.

⁹⁶⁶ Rapple, *The Metaphor of the City*, 78.

⁹⁶⁷ Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 937. Cf. Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, 432; Louw-Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (§58.64) also mentions among the figurative extensions of the noun μήτηρ (§10.16), that of ‘archetype’.

⁹⁶⁸ Bergmeier, *Die Erzhure und das Tier*, 3899-3916.

⁹⁶⁹ Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 937.

⁹⁷⁰ Marion Carson, *The Harlot, the Beast and the Sex Trafficker: Reflections on Some Recent Feminist Interpretations of Revelation 17-18*, in: *Expository Times*, 122(5)/2011, 218-227, 219.

⁹⁷¹ Sals, *Die Biographie*, 88.

Not only that the Great Whore could be viewed as corporate identity,⁹⁷² this communitarian perspective can be applied to other mothers in the Apocalypse, who ‘mother’ or build communities around them.

Unlike the woman of chapter 12, whose offspring show obedience to God and are faithful to Jesus,⁹⁷³ the Great Whore is “mothering a counter-community, whose distinguishing mark is infidelity”⁹⁷⁴, otherwise referred as ‘all nations’ –πάντα τὰ ἔθνη (12:5, 14:8, 18:3.23).

Intertextually, Gal 4:26 features a reference to Jerusalem as mother of Christians,⁹⁷⁵ which can further contribute to sharpen the collective understanding of μήτηρ.

It was mentioned several times already that gender stereotyping in the Apocalypse is limiting. This is an example of such a phenomenon.

This limitation refers to the following situation: the gendered figure gains value from the male child (heir) she produces (12:1-6), or potentially produces (cf. the virginal Bride of the Lamb).

Therefore, the progeny’s primary characteristic refers strictly to the character’s essence.

Osborne remarks “in the NT the phrase ‘son of’ refers to one’s primary characteristic (e.g. ‘son of righteousness’).”⁹⁷⁶

By extension ‘mother of’, in this case ‘whores’, not only describes one in terms of chief attributes, it also means that one has reproduced the shameful characteristic in others.

Given the reference to Babylon as city and coupling this with the ‘mother’ feature, it is not uncommon among commentators⁹⁷⁷ to elaborate on “a play on the word ‘μητρόπολις’ which in Greek means ‘mother city’. Subsequently, the figurative meaning of μήτηρ is preserved, but it fosters of a politico-economical understanding.

⁹⁷² Cf. Rissi, *Die Verführung*, 55f. Also Tavo, *Woman, Mother and Bride*, 227-232f; Räßle, *The Metaphor of the City*, 89f.

⁹⁷³ Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, 432. Murphy, *Fallen is Babylon*, 294. Cf. Corrington Streete, *The Strange Woman*, 149; Garrett, *Revelation*, in: *Women’s Bible Commentary*, 471.

⁹⁷⁴ Campbell, *Feminine Urban Imagery*, 89. He also quotes Beale’s comment to support this view: “The Babylonian mother spawns faithless children, whereas the mother of chapter 12 produces faithful offspring” (Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 859).

⁹⁷⁵ Sals, *Die Biographie*, 87.

⁹⁷⁶ Osborne, *Revelation*, 612f.

⁹⁷⁷ Beckwith, *The Apocalypse of John*, 692; Swete, *Commentary on Revelation*, 217; Rossing, *The Choice*, 83; Sals, *Die Biographie*, 86.

The term πόλις is usually associated with the “themes of foundation, nurture, indwelling and protection”, which “when converted into masculine-feminine relations”⁹⁷⁸ can provide an explanation for the motherly character ascribed to it.

A metropolis is a denomination for “major cities”⁹⁷⁹ that have ‘given birth’ to colonies or daughter cities”, taking, the form of a “protectress of its citizens, who are its ‘children’.”⁹⁸⁰ In this view, people’s “trading and diplomatic relationship with her are in truth an alliance with her idolatrous and satanic rejection of the lordship of God and the Lamb”.⁹⁸¹

The ‘mother-colony’ aspect of Babylon was fructuous as per some expressions of the gender-informed perspectives focusing on Babylon the Great.

Here, gender issues were elaborated upon by extending Babylon’s political understanding in various nationalistic, colonial and postcolonial discourses.⁹⁸²

With this perspective, the focus in the metaphor shifts.

The gender-informed interest on the city’s role as mother together with a conjoining of other terms such as ‘goddess’, ‘queen’, implies that the “role of the feminine is not always subordinate.”⁹⁸³ If taken at a face value, the Great Whore’s constitutive elements may also point to a positive evaluation of the image.

The roots of the gendered metaphor are formulated in view of the protection ensured by some ancient gendered depictions of cities. ‘Mother’ features as part of the title of some ancient goddesses, such as Demeter, Rhea, Isis as well as title of some empresses, e.g. Julia Domna –*mater castrorum*.⁹⁸⁴

⁹⁷⁸ John J. Schmitt, Gender Correctness and Biblical Metaphors: The Case of God’s Relation to Israel, in: *Biblical Theology Bulletin*, 26/1996, 96-106, 97.

⁹⁷⁹ Rossing lists various ancient authors who envision Rome, Athens, Jerusalem, Tyre, Corinth in this manner (Rossing, *The Choice*, 84, ft. 70). Cf. Henry George Liddell Robert Scott and Henry Stuart Jones, s.v. μητρόπολις in: *Greek-English Lexicon: A Supplement*, (hereafter abbreviated with Liddell-Scott, *Greek-English Lexicon*), Oxford: Clarendon, 964.

⁹⁸⁰ Rossing, *The Choice*, 83. To attest such use, Rossing mentions the fact that the metaphor functions further, because when OT makes references to a city’s losing ‘daughter-towns’ (Ezek 26:6.8), such fact is likened to a mother’s loss of children (Isa 47:8). (Rossing, *The Choice*, 83f.).

⁹⁸¹ Blount, *Revelation*, 316.

⁹⁸² Kim, Uncovering Her Wickedness, 62-65, 73f, 77-81 (as cited by Hanna Stenström, *Feminists in Search of a Usable Future*, in: William Lyons, Jorunn Økland (eds.) *The Way the World End? The Apocalypse of John in Culture and Ideology*, Sheffield: Phoenix Press, 2009, 240-266, 257, ft. 94). Cf. Surekha Nelavala, ‘Babylon the Great Mother of Whores’ (Rev 17:5): A Postcolonial Feminist Perspective, in: *The Expository Times*, 121(2), 2009, 60-65. Also cf. Vander Stichele, *Just a Whore*.

⁹⁸³ Schmitt, Gender Correctness, 103.

⁹⁸⁴ Sals, *Die Biographie*, 86.

Summary

Another female stereotype, namely that of 'mother' was elaborated upon.

I have encompassed in the above analysis the large spectre of the term's usages, ranging from literal to figurative and mythical, from an individual reference to a collective reference, from a corporeal aspect to an immaterial one.

'Mother' is the pivotal element connecting the four major gendered characters of the Apocalypse. Their depiction includes references to their children.

Jezebel's children are mentioned, the Woman Clothed with the Sun of 12 is actually giving birth to a male child, the Bride may be seen as a potential mother and the Great Whore is the only textually named woman in the Apocalypse, mother of whores and of the abominations on earth.

It is for reason that an important aid to the identification of the function of the Great Whore is offered by the comparison, and contrast with the other gendered images of the Apocalypse.

The tabular perspective highlights a dualistic view on women (good vs. bad). This strategy places the Whore of 17-18 in the larger category of immorality/uncleanness/evil.

The contrast is achieved with the Bride, the comparison with Jezebel: the Whore stands in opposition with the Bride of the Lamb, something that is not at all new in this study.

The contrast with 12 is also anchored in the motif of the depiction of enemies of God, as Tobias Nicklas accurately observes.⁹⁸⁵ Such a contextualization contributes to the development of the motif of 'justice of retribution', dealt with in the following chapters of the Apocalypse.

It is important to note how the 'mother' personification in v.5 will be developed into a more politico-economical interpretation of Babylon in the following chapter.

The designations 'mother' and 'whore' in this verse belong to the feminine spectre. It is however interesting to observe that although a positive feminine trait, motherhood is evaluated negatively with the Great Whore, a fact which is consistent with the entire presentation of the Great Whore.

Considering the negative load of the gendered metaphor, one should attribute a great level of importance to the emotional involvement of readers in the apocalyptic dramatic scenario.

⁹⁸⁵ Cf. Tobias Nicklas, *Der „Pantokrator“: Inszenierung von Gottes Macht in der Offenbarung des Johannes*, in: *Hervormde Teologiese Studies*, 68 (1)/2012, 1-7.

The image is consistent with the negative depiction. If unaware of the androcentric gender ideology hidden in the gendered metaphor, the reader may rush into finding a justification for the Whore's condemnation, which happens in accordance with the divine will expressed textually by the *angelus interpretes* and rendered minutely by the Seer.

(Mother) of the Earth's abominations

Of the possible translations of 'mother' presented above, the phrase '(mother) of the Earth's abominations' purports a figurative meaning that is applied in explicating its semantic content. This phrasing aims at epitomizing evil, extending the reference to βδέλυγμα from the previous verse, when the noun described the content of the cup the Whore was holding.

Maybe such a fact shows the unity of the dimensions of the Great Whore, of corporeal, i.e. woman and geopolitical nature, respectively the Great Whore, for what is said of the former stands true for the latter.

Additionally, in view of the Whore's associations with the Beast, the textual connection from v. 4 is extended and applied to 'Babylon'.

A deeper dimension develops further the portrait of the Great Whore by association with "earth".

It is not the first time earth is mentioned as connected with the Whore. The 'inhabitants of the earth' and the 'kings of the earth' were mentioned previously when the whore's various impious interactions with them were described.

Also, the genitive construction in question completes the scene began in v.2, where the association with the inhabitants of the earth lead ultimately to the Whore's damnation. The "earth" carries significance that it delineates the boundaries of the Whore's influence. Positively assessed, her power, influence and status are discussed. Negatively assessed, however, these are limited to things/people of the earth.

The genitive τῆς γῆς can be taken as descriptive as in 'earthly abominations', or possessive as in 'earth's abominations'.

It can denote as well a directional genitive, translated subsequently as ‘abominations on earth’.⁹⁸⁶ For the intents and purposes of this study, I choose the translation ‘earth’s abominations’.

The noun βδέλυγμα –abomination –remains unspecified throughout the Apocalypse, to the extent that the readers can imagine the term to denote whatever is most gruesome to them.⁹⁸⁷

Because of the lack of specification, various contexts, as well as OT intertextual references are evaluated.

Nevertheless, the plural form of the noun has a negative connotation, when analyzed in context. It is informed either by the previous reference to the woman’s cup filled with ‘impurities’ or she being ‘mother of whores’. It can be also related to previous mentions implying various expressions of “what is considered impure, be it food or sexual acts or other things”⁹⁸⁸ as well as idol worshipping – for which a vast OT tradition testifies. The instances are evident mostly in the Apocalypse with the Beast’s actions. These have been previously referred at.

The Great Whore’s chief association with ‘abominations’ is therefore given by her immoral deceitfulness. It is obvious in the close-connectedness, even equation between a sexual and a religious sin:⁹⁸⁹ both are serious offenses to God and both deserve to be punished.

Because with ‘mother’ the communal aspect was already emphasized, idolatry “as abstract phenomenon is embedded in the community”⁹⁹⁰ leading thus to its destruction.

These implications are thus not new with the current analysis, recurring frequently with the characterization of the Great Whore.

⁹⁸⁶ Osborne, *Revelation*, 612.

⁹⁸⁷ Carey, *A Man’s Choice*, 155. Cf. Sals, *Die Biographie*, 89.

⁹⁸⁸ Stenström, *Is Salvation Only For True Men?*, 192.

⁹⁸⁹ Corrington Streete, *The Strange Woman*, 5.

⁹⁹⁰ Räßle, *The Metaphor of the City*, 128.

5.2 Provisional Assessment (5)

The description of the woman in the vision of Apocalypse 17 continues in v. 5. It culminates with the revealing of a name of mystery, 'Babylon the Great'. The name is supplemented, probably for the readers, by additional information on the Whore's character: she is 'mother of whores and of earth's abominations'.

'Prostitute' and 'woman' designate the same reality: "their identification in 17.5.7.(18) under the heading of *μυστήριον*" [...] invites and assists "in the 'active reading' of Rev 17."⁹⁹¹

However, both when read in isolation and when read in the immediate context delineated so far, the title hardly aims to evoke respect or sympathy for the woman depicted.

"With 'Babylon the great, mother of whores' in 17:5, the amalgamated feminine and urban imagery of the woman-city metaphor becomes explicit."⁹⁹² Here, the focus shifts partially from corporeality towards a geopolitical dimension, from woman to city,⁹⁹³ though not completely. The turning point is represented explicitly by 17:18 and will be consistent throughout the next chapter.

The vision and the setting, in which the name emerges, make it impossible for Babylon to be taken at a face value, or literally. Moreover, the rhetorical character of the current academic endeavour focuses rather on *how* Babylon operates, rather than *who/what* Babylon is.

By placing the Great Whore at the centre of interest conceives the other images of women either as antithetical (Bride, The Woman Clothed with the Sun), or as bearing resemblance to the Whore (Jezebel), by virtue of the similitudes in actions.

The strategy applied in understanding Babylon's character was one in which comparison and contrast was employed.

"The feminine imagery of Rev 17 is not found in a similar form elsewhere in Revelation. The contrast between the corporeal dimension of the Woman of chapter 12 and the Woman of chapter 17 is intentional. In this manner, having offered a model in chapter 12, the reader

⁹⁹¹ Ruiz, *Ezekiel in the Apocalypse*, 337.

⁹⁹² Campbell, *Antithetical Feminine Urban Imagery*, 87.

⁹⁹³ Campbell, *Antithetical Feminine Urban Imagery*, 87, Cf. Rossing, *The Choice*, 83 contra Ruiz, *Ezekiel in the Apocalypse*, 334.

can identify easily what distinguishes the Great Whore from the Woman Clothed with the Sun.”⁹⁹⁴

As a result of elaborating on the nature of the woman, it was clearly evidenced that the Seer’s masculine perception has no tolerance regarding the presentation and characterization of the Great Whore. This attitude matches very well the angel’s introduction in 17: 1-2, who addresses the Seer because he is about to show the judgment of the Great Whore.

The parallel literary construction of the Great Whore with Jezebel brought interesting issues into the limelight. From the parallel itself, standardized methods of approaching the enemies of God in the Apocalypse resulted. The ‘rhetoric of conflict’ applies to both characters exhaustively.

Because of that, I consider the corporeal dimension in the description of the Great Whore should not be overlooked. Without it, or the references to the whore’s femininity repeated as leitmotifs in the vision of chapter 17, the image of the Great Whore is on the one hand incomplete, and on the other hand, it purports a lesser emotional impact on the readers.

Similarly, the name Βαβυλών attempts at connecting the three dimensions of the Great Whore. It links the previously mentioned terms of ‘prostitute’ (vv. 1-2) with the following political term, that of ‘city’ (v.18).

The reference results in a plethora of interpretations on the correct identification of Babylon, which does not pertain to the scope of the gendered reading I am pursuing.

According to gender-informed interests, if Babylon’s identification stresses the geopolitical dimension of the name, respectively that of πόλις, it is v. 18 which is taken literally, implying a metaphorical use of the other two terms, namely that of γυνή and πόρνη.⁹⁹⁵

If the generic perspective is favoured, images of immorality connote with seduction, irregular sexual behaviour, perversion, usually associated with the feminine in the description of evil are activated. Here, any politico-economical implication of πόλις is to various degrees, obliterated.

Nevertheless, the literal dimension of Babylon in terms of referent cannot be accepted, as the majority of exegetical commentaries exhaustively indicate.

For the intents and purposes of this study, it is imperious not to overlook the gender ideology hidden in the title ‘mother of whores’. With the critique, two aspects are extremely important.

⁹⁹⁴ Ruiz, *Ezekiel in the Apocalypse*, 235.

⁹⁹⁵ Vander Stichele, *Re-membering the Whore*, 109.

John's view could be referred to in modern terminology is referred to as *essentialist*. This perspective involves references to biological aspects: according to this logic, women are either mothers by virtue of giving birth, or potential mothers as brides.

Also, the dissatisfaction with the misogynist content of the title 'mother of whores' should be acknowledged, even if the image is only a metaphor.

It is more than a metaphor, it is a gendered metaphor that hides in its formulation the question of whether women "are forced to betray" their sexuality in order to have the correct perspective on the text that male readers have.⁹⁹⁶

In other words, it can affect the readers' relationship to the text, where the process of immasculation may occur:

"The woman reader is thus divided: she wants to identify with the good, but is reluctant to do so because the images deny female self-determination; she hesitates to identify with the bad but many endorse the defiance of the 'whores' against those who would control or destroy them."⁹⁹⁷

The gendered metaphor is in dire of appropriate treatment, as it was amply shown. With some postmodern approaches in feminist exegesis, however, it is very hard to maintain the balance between the corporeal and the political dimensions of the image complex, identified throughout the study as the Great Whore. As a result, some of their focuses undergo a transformative process: from Babylon to 'Babylon', from 'whore' to 'Whore Babylon' and lastly to Whore Babylon.⁹⁹⁸

⁹⁹⁶ Kim, *Uncovering Her Wickedness*, 61.

⁹⁹⁷ Garrett, *Revelation*, 474.

⁹⁹⁸ Sals, *Die Biographie*, 507.

6. Seer's reaction to the vision

a καὶ εἶδον τὴν γυναῖκα μεθύουσαν ἐκ τοῦ αἵματος
τῶν ἁγίων
καὶ ἐκ τοῦ αἵματος
τῶν μαρτύρων
Ἰησοῦ.
b Καὶ ἐθαύμασα ἰδὼν αὐτὴν θαῦμα μέγα.

(And I saw the woman drunk with the blood of the saints and with the blood of the witnesses of Christ. And I was greatly amazed, upon seeing her/this)

6.1 Preliminary Considerations

The metaphorical composition as depicted with the portrayal of the Great Prostitute reaches its culmination with another tableau in the 'montage' of the gendered metaphor. This verse stands in the category of the most repelling images in the Apocalypse. The image of refined woman, strongly sexualized, arrayed in expensive garment and bedecked with resplendent ornaments, who is drunk with blood is absolutely revolting.

John contemplates the vision in the desert from afar, devoid of all possible distractions. It is only now when the Seer perceives the Whore's ultimate reality: judging her actions he contributes yet again to the divine authorization of her punishment announced by the angel in the introduction to this vision.

Compositionally, the verse concludes the vision introduced by the angel.

As if the ultimate textual image of the Great Whore as the "mother of whores and of all abominations on earth" was not enough in her quality of *epitomized depiction of evil*, v. 6 introduces another ghoulish dimension in the characterization, by placing her in the same monstrous context as the Beast, upon which she stands astride. Her persecutor nature is revealed and the victims are the saints and the witnesses of Christ.

In other words, instead being worthy of a 'mother' as life giver, as originator of new creation, the Great Whore brings about death. Her actions inaugurate the dawn of the old creation, the end of the earthly: she ultimately destroys her very own kind. That is in actuality a very explicit guilt marked by violence.⁹⁹⁹

⁹⁹⁹ DeSilva, *Seeing Things*, 207. Cf. Yarbrow Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis*, 123.

In this manner, violence is added to her committing sexual immorality, as well as ‘mothering’ whores.

At the same time, one can register a change of focus from the sexual register recurrent in the previous verses to the ultimate moral lapse –feeding on one’s blood –even if both abominations with which she identifies are immoral.

It can be argued that, in terms of importance, her guilt of killing God’s people is far more atrocious in nature, than her displaying of illegitimate sexual acts.

Structurally, this verse is concluding the subunit comprising the verses 3b to 6a, by means of a mechanism materialized in the parallel use of καὶ εἶδον γυναῖκα –‘and I saw a woman’. With the verse in discussion, there are actually two issues implied, namely, the extent of the Whore’s actions, conceived in genocidal terms, as well as the intoxicating effect blood had on the perpetrator. The victims are the larger category of witnesses and saints of Christ.

When analyzing the different compositional elements in particular, interesting semantic phenomena are registered.

Despite the similar grammatical phrasing, the function of the verb of perception, i.e. εἶδον differs.

In v. 3a, the verb ὁράω is charged with the anticipation of the vision unfolding before the eyes of the Seer. Its function is retrospective, for it refers back to what was already seen.¹⁰⁰⁰

Additionally, the verb corresponds with the sequentiality of John’s narration of the vision: for the Seer does not seem to perceive from the very beginning the Great Whore’s state of mind or implications of her repulsive acts reverberated on the saints and witnesses of Jesus.

Even if functionally, the two employments of the verb ὁράω are identical, i.e. descriptive, the type of description they denote differs. By contrast, the first employment of εἶδον in this unit, respectively v.3 has a *physically* descriptive valence; the other use of the same verb is *morally* descriptive, for it includes references to the Great Whore’s immoral behaviour.

Worth mentioning is also the fact that John is consistent with the gynomorphic image elaborated previously, by referring to the Great Whore as γυνή –woman.

Therefore, this verse contributes to the cohesion of the different tableaux of the vision of chapter 17 as a whole. It links the previous subunit (vv.1-2) in terms of the negative interactions of the Great Whore, as a dangerous and enticing figure: by references to ‘fornication’ (v.1) and ‘intoxication’ (v.2). At the same time, it introduces new information

¹⁰⁰⁰ Blount, *Revelation*, 316.

on her persecuting and violent nature, which was previously only implied by her association with the Beast.

Consequently, the Great Whore's appetite needs to be appeased by human blood.

Further, the source of inebriation raises from a grammatical perspective various variants of interpretation.

First, the construction μεθύω+ἐκ+genitive displays an instrumental function.

The instrumentality is given by the idea of an object or means used in performing or accomplishing an action, in other words, the 'blood of witnesses and the blood of saints' represents the instrument, or means by which the Great Whore becomes intoxicated. Here, the Seer merely contemplates only on the effects of such inebriation.

It is uncertain whether the Great Whore's current inebriated status is because she drank from the cup she holds in her hand mentioned previously in v. 4: ἔχουσα ποτήριον χρυσοῦν ἐν τῇ χειρὶ αὐτῆς, which was γέμον βδελυγμάτων καὶ τὰ ἀκάθαρτα τῆς πορνείας αὐτῆς –full of abominations and the impurities of her fornication.

In virtue of these specifications, it is therefore very improbable that the source of inebriation in v. 6 coincides with the one in the previous verse, even if the referent is the same.¹⁰⁰¹

The two beverages, respectively abominations and the impurities of the Whore's fornication and the blood of the witnesses and the blood of saints have antagonistic value. They most probably target different audiences: whereas the impurities of her fornications are meant to intoxicate the inhabitants of the earth into alienating them from God as well as the kings of the earth, the blood of the saints and of the witnesses of Christ has an inebriating effect solely on the Whore.

Another parallel phrasing is obvious with the mentioning of the Whore's inebriating source: ἐκ τοῦ αἵματος τῶν ἁγίων καὶ ἐκ τοῦ αἵματος τῶν μαρτύρων Ἰησοῦ. In both cases, the reference to blood is explicit –ἐκ τοῦ αἵματος, being followed by parallel genitive constructions in plural –τῶν ἁγίων, τῶν μαρτύρων that indicates whose blood it is meant. In the case of the witnesses, however another genitive formulation features: the witnesses are Jesus' –Ἰησοῦ.

Regarding the conjunction καὶ there are two possibilities listed: either as coordinative, or epexegetical.

¹⁰⁰¹ Contra Zimmerman, *Geschlechtermetaphorik und Gottesverhältnis*, 403: "[Ferner] befindet sich in dem Becher kein Wein, sondern der „Schmutz der Hurerei“, der später mit dem Blut der Heiligen und Zeugen identifiziert wird (Apk 17,6)."

Such identification could be plausible only when judging the common effect of being contaminated both as a result of committing fornication and of drinking blood, namely uncleanness. However, if one remains more anchored in the realities of the text, and considering the differences in the situations described in vv. 4 and 6, I prefer to maintain that the two are separate both in nature and in function.

The option for either variant points ultimately to the number of groups implicated in the Whore's atrocious acts.

When the conjunction is coordinative, the two groups are clearly separated: the saints and the witnesses of Christ. In this case, however, it denotes the similarity of construction between the 'blood of the saints' and the 'blood of the witnesses'.

When καί is epexegetical, the second phrase becomes an explanatory phrase for the first one, having the meaning in translation: 'with the blood of the saints, who are of the witnesses of Christ'.¹⁰⁰²

Furthermore, it is debated whether the genitive Ἰησοῦ in the Greek construction τῶν μαρτύρων Ἰησοῦ should be translated as an objective genitive or a subjective genitive.¹⁰⁰³

With the first option, the rendering of the genitive would read 'of the witnesses to Jesus', having Jesus as the object of their testimony. In the second case, the phrasing could be translated as 'of the witnesses of Jesus', where the witnesses are directly connected with Jesus, in terms of their appurtenance.

In the closing verse of this vision features the first person singular. The subjective perspective functions as red thread in framing the vision, as well as reinforces the revelatory character of the sequence of events in the apocalyptic scenario.

The verse also records the reaction the Seer has, namely that of 'great amazement', rendered by Greek with a pleonastic construction. It conjoins words from the semantic field of the noun θαῦμα, respectively, ἐθαύμασα [...] θαῦμα μέγα. The nature, object and the rhetorical function of this reaction will be thoroughly explored.

From a *gender-informed perspective*, the entire verse under scrutiny is closing the description of the Great Whore in the same negative vein. It maintains the corporeal reference to the Great Whore as 'woman'. Literary speaking, neither this identification, nor its associations are new for the reader or interpreter. Such a denomination will be analyzed against the backdrop of the verse that completes the portrayal of the Great Whore.

Subsequently, because the feminine character is involved with spilling and drinking the blood of martyrs as wine, violence is an important theme to be discussed. It connects with the various ethically charged expressions of divine retribution.

John, the Seer adds violence to the list of the accusations, so far formulated, respectively whoring, self-pretension (hubris), deceiving and drinking abuse.

In this formulation, he places himself on the side of the oppressed. This category will be there to witness the sequence of events in which the object of the divine wrath becomes

¹⁰⁰² Smalley, *Revelation to John*, 432; Blount, *Revelation*, 316; Cf. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 860: „The two groups of believers may be in mind, but the καί is best taken as explanatory ('even'). Consequently, true 'saints' are those who are 'witnesses' to Jesus." (Author's emphasis).

¹⁰⁰³ Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 860, cf. Yarbro Collins, art. Revelation, in: *NJBC*, 1012.

the gendered character in Apocalypse 17, since blood must be avenged¹⁰⁰⁴ and God remembers her sins (18:5). Thus the Seer reiterates an attitude of resistance for the Christians: they already know that the Great Whore is under divine trial (17:1) and they have been already called conquerors (cf. 2:7.11.17.11.17).

It will be thus evidenced that the manner in which 'woman' operates is not morally neutral. She is not the innocent prostitute blamed for every evil in the eschatological scenario, but the malicious harlot involved in the extermination of God's people and so, the Great Whore is liable to be placed under divine trial.

Her lack of neutrality corresponds exactly to the Seer's lack of neutrality in presenting the narrative. He does not simply recounts what he sees, but acts as God's bond-servant – δοῦλος, whose object of testimony is the word of God and the testimony brought to Jesus Christ (1:2). In view of these, the Seer became worthy of receiving the revelation of Jesus Christ (1:1).

And I saw the woman drunk

By virtue of its occurrence, Kowalski classifies the above image as unique in the Bible.¹⁰⁰⁵

The framing mechanisms employed in this verse include the twofold maintenance of the first person singular of the verb of perception – ὁράω, as well as the consistence of the gynomorphic image, namely that of γυνή.

By using the verb of perception, not only that John remains anchored in the reality of the vision, but also he is consistent with the narrative voice. The perspective will change in the following verses from the 1st person sg. to the 2nd person sg., as the angel will take the lead, providing the Seer with a selective explanation of elements in the vision.

The "I" of the narratorial voice is especially important in this verse for several reasons. Firstly, it biases the account by delineating the affiliation of the Seer with the oppressed.

Secondly, having previous textual indications on the judgment –κρίμα of the Great Whore, it communicates on the attributes of God, who will not overlook injustice and oppression.

Thirdly, in view of the divine promises revolving around the fact that God "will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more" (21:4), the perspective propagates 'perseverance' –ὑπομονή.

¹⁰⁰⁴ The idea that blood 'cries out' for vengeance is common with Gen 4:10, 2 Macc 8:3, 2, 2 Esdr 15:8, Sib. Or. 3:313 (cf. Streett, *Here Comes the Judge*, 198, ft. 20). Cf. Yarbro Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis*, 114 with reference to the apocalyptic text in discussion: "The expectation that God would avenge innocent blood is attested elsewhere [...]."

¹⁰⁰⁵ Kowalski, *Die Rezeption des Propheten Ezechiel*, 183.

In doing so, the Seer rhetorically invites the reader to reason according to his logic, as well as to envision the strong connectedness and dependence between the God and creation. Additionally, the woman, who was introduced as the Great Whore by the angel remains so throughout the vision, as the Seer is consistent with gynomorphic references (vv. 3.4.6). Further, the noun γυνή contributes to the unity of dimensions featured with the description of the Great Whore, namely that of 'whore' (17:1.5.15.15), 'woman' (17:3.4.6.7.18) and 'city' (17:18, 18).

Moreover, this time around the noun 'woman' is also articulated, just like the previous occurrence in v.4, when the dress and ornaments of the Whore were analyzed. It indicates the fact that the woman represented here is not new to the readers. For this reason, that what follows contributes in terms of cohesion to the continuity of the vision, by adding up to the already analyzed elements.

The image of 'woman' remains truthful to the manner in which the Great Whore was so far depicted. As previously mentioned the implications and functions of γυνή remain valid for the adequate grasping of the feminine dimension in the description of the Great Whore.

In view of the multiple references to the Great Whore as 'woman', it is to me extremely hard to accept that some exponents even in the biblical scholarship are still reluctant to acknowledge the implications of the generic perspective in their analyses, to an important extent.¹⁰⁰⁶

In another order of ideas, a new element is introduced in what concerns the relational depiction of the woman. So far, the Great Whore was portrayed as partaking in an immoral liaison with the kings of the earth, then, as responsible for inebriating the inhabitants of the earth.

Subsequently, her posture indicated a relationship with the Beast and now she is standing in a relationship to the saints and the witnesses of Jesus.

Nevertheless, the type of this relationship is not at all new: it was proclaimed previously, by her association with the Beast.

This association is based on two coordinates. On the one hand, readers already know the persecuting actions of the various embodiments of Beasts. The Beast is no exception in this vision, if we consider the belligerent actions taken against the Lamb and the Whore, described further in chapter 17.

¹⁰⁰⁶ Cf. for example Schüssler-Fiorenza, *The Power of the Word*, 143: "In the feminist debate about the gendered figuration of Babylon and the disagreement about the misogyny of Revelation, I have argued against an essentializing and naturalizing tendency, which claims that the metaphor of the Whore Babylon connotes to a wo/man rather than to a city."

On the other hand, the relevance of the posture of the Great Whore, as ‘seating’ on the Beast was studied in v.3. then, it implied a similitude in their actions and purpose, which is now made even clearer.

Moreover, there is no apparent enmity between the first three groups, namely kings and inhabitants of the Earth and the Beast, who seem to cohabit well with the Great Whore. The Whore is placed in a clearly antagonistic posture with the saints and the witnesses to Jesus.

In this verse, her allies are no longer mentioned, therefore one could assume that she acted alone in exterminating¹⁰⁰⁷ God’s chosen ones.

Different literary expressions of the metaphor of drinking and intoxication feature prominently not only throughout the verses presented previously (17:2.4), but also in the current verse of our interest (v.6). Moreover, this metaphor is also extended to the next chapter (cf. 18:3.6).

In the following, I will discuss the manner in which the metaphor of intoxication is applied and functions within the visionary report.

Therefore, previously, the above-mentioned image features in the context prompted by the introduction to the vision, respectively in v. 2 and was also alluded to when the content of the Whore’s cup was mentioned, respectively in v. 4.

The comparative verses can be subsumed to the following schema:

Table 6

Content	Source	Subjects
v.2 [...] καὶ ἐμεθύσθησαν οἱ κατοικοῦντες τὴν γῆν ἐκ τοῦ οἴνου τῆς πορνείας αὐτῆς [...] and with the wine of whose fornication the inhabitants of the earth have become drunk.	wine	inhabitants of the earth
v.4 [...] ἔχουσα ποτήριον χρυσοῦν ἐν τῇ χειρὶ αὐτῆς γέμον βδελυγμάτων καὶ τὰ ἀκάθαρτα τῆς πορνείας αὐτῆς [...] having in her hand a gold cup full of abominations and of the impurities of her immorality.	abomination	

¹⁰⁰⁷ The issue of ‘violence’ will be referred to at a later point in the analysis. In any case, the image of the Great Whore in this verse surely alludes to the intimate connection of ‘blood’ with ‘life’.

v.6 [...] καὶ εἶδον τὴν γυναῖκα μεθύουσαν ἐκ τοῦ αἵματος τῶν ἁγίων καὶ ἐκ τοῦ αἵματος τῶν μαρτύρων Ἰησοῦ. And I saw that the woman was drunk with the blood of the saints and the blood of the witnesses to Jesus.	blood	woman
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It is interesting that the compositional elements of the image, namely, the *content*, *source* and *subjects* keep changing. In v. 2 the inhabitants are ‘inebriated with the wine or her (i.e. the whore’s) fornication’, whereas in v.4, the cup held by the Great Whore had as content ‘abominations and impurities of her fornication’. In v. 6, the Whore herself is drunk, however, with the ‘blood of the saints and of the saints and of the witnesses of/to Christ’. I would like to develop the concept of drunkenness, as well as its implication, including the denotative and connotative uses.

Without repeating the associations purported by drunkenness in 17:2, I would like to make the following observations.

Drunkenness as a state of mind is condemned in OT, to various extents. For example Proverbs warns of its potential dangers in 20:1, 21:17, 23:30. Isa 5:1f, Hab 2:5, Sir 19:1f act in the same manner.¹⁰⁰⁸ In these references it is argued that consuming wine contributes to one’s moral and financial and physical ruining, being the source of one’s haughtiness, grief, sorrows, strife and complaints, leading to search for prostitutes’ company.

In the NT, the above mentioned verbs are employed predominantly in their literal sense. So, their derivatives, either in substantival or adjectival form feature on the vice lists¹⁰⁰⁹ in 1 Cor 5:11, 6:10, Rom 13:13, among which is mentioned sexual licentiousness, greed, idolatry, quarrelling. 1 Pet 4:3 mentions drunkenness as one of the chief characteristics of the Gentiles.¹⁰¹⁰

There are two roots of the verb denoting intoxication, which feature in the Apocalypse and in the images of the vision in chapter 17. In the following, I will analyze the similarities and differences between the two occurrences of the verb, since they are relevant for the current study.

¹⁰⁰⁸ B. L. Bandstra, “Wine”, in: Geoffrey W. Bromiley et al. (eds.), *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia (Q-Z)*, vol. 4, 1068-1072, 1070.

¹⁰⁰⁹ H. Preisker s.v. méthē inter alia, in: Gerhard Kittel (ed.), *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (vol. IV), Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999, 4: 545-548, 546.

¹⁰¹⁰ Barry L. Bandstra, “Wine” in: G. Bromiley (ed.), *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* (vol. 4), Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1988, 1068-1072, 1070.

The *roots* mentioned above are μεθύσκομαι (or μεθύσκω) in 17:2, whereas in 17:6, the verbal variant of μεθύω features.

On a semantic level, both denote the same action, i.e. becoming drunk, or inebriated. The difference in form would account for that μεθύω is used only in present and imperfect (cf. Matt 24:29, Acts 2:15, 1 Thess 5:7) –similar with the participial present form in 17:6 –and μεθύσκω is used in future and aorist, having a middle or passive form (cf. John 2:10).¹⁰¹¹

Another observation concerns the *aspect* of verb in v.2b that is passive (ἐμεθύσθησαν), indicating most probably the Whore as agent.

In v.6a, the active meaning of μεθύω (more exactly the participial form of the verb, i.e. μεθύουσας) indicates the fact that the Whore is actant in the process of getting drunk.

The form of the verb in v.6a is very important, for it pendulates between the descriptive and the performative function.

As a result, the participial construction could continue the description of the woman,¹⁰¹² in the manner of the other previous uses of present or perfect participle forms. The present participle here could also ‘describe an action that only then happens, when John contemplates it’.¹⁰¹³

Further, when comparing vv. 2 and 6 on the criterion of how the intoxication image is employed, the following observations emerge.

Apart from the different grammatical diatheses employed with the verbs mentioned above, the *subjects* of the verb vary. With v.2b, the inhabitants of the earth –οἱ κατοικοῦντες τὴν γῆν –are drunk. In v.5 the woman herself – ἡ γυνή is being portrayed as such.

Despite the maddening and possibly addictive effect of inebriation, the difference from the previous reference is that the metaphor of intoxication is now defocused from the inhabitants of the earth onto the Whore herself.

As a result, she is now portrayed as “an infernal hostess, ruining those she entices to the luxurious table of her deadly banquet”¹⁰¹⁴, very much like a ‘femme fatale’.

Also, the *source* of the intoxication differs: the inhabitants on the earth were made drunk with the wine of her fornication –ἐκ τοῦ οἴνου τῆς πορνείας αὐτῆς –but the woman is

¹⁰¹¹ Timothy Friberg, Barbara Friberg, Neva F. Miller, *Analytical Lexicon of the Greek New Testament*, (Baker's Greek New Testament Library), Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000, (BibleWorks (v.8.), s.v. μεθύω).

¹⁰¹² Cf. participial construction referring to the Great Whore such as **καθημένης** ἐπὶ ὕδατων πολλῶν (17:1), **καθημένην** ἐπὶ θηρίον κόκκινον (17:3), **περιβεβλημένη** πορφυροῦν καὶ κόκκινον καὶ **κεχρυσωμένη** χρυσίῳ καὶ λίθῳ τιμίῳ καὶ μαργαρίταις, **ἔχουσα** ποτήριον χρυσοῦν (17:4), ἐπὶ τὸ μέτωπον αὐτῆς ὄνομα **γεγραμμένον** (17:5).

¹⁰¹³ Pezzoli-Olgati, *Täuschung und Klarheit*, 144, ft. 2.

¹⁰¹⁴ Ruiz, *Ezekiel in the Apocalypse*, 278.

drunk with the blood of the saints and of the witnesses to Jesus –ἐκ τοῦ αἵματος τῶν ἁγίων καὶ ἐκ τοῦ αἵματος τῶν μαρτύρων Ἰησοῦ.”

The Apocalypse may register a derailed employment from the NT literal understanding of the image in question. At least according to the The Friberg Lexicon¹⁰¹⁵ the two episodes in discussion, respectively μεθύσκω in v. 2 and μεθύω in v.6 have a *connotative* meaning, thus need to be taken metaphorically, or understood figuratively.

Subsequently, μεθύσκω can be paraphrased in terms of its figurative meaning as ‘to give oneself over to something’ implying an unrestraint and orgiastic cult activity.¹⁰¹⁶

In keeping with the connotative use, the Lexicon opts for a metaphorical understanding of the verb μεθύω in v.6 as “describing the preoccupation with killing many people.”¹⁰¹⁷

The transition registered with this image is dependent on the context in which it occurs, whose leitmotifs are, or will be repeated throughout the Apocalypse.

As a result, the interpretation of the first image, respectively “to give oneself over to something” is better to be comprehended in connection with sorceries – φαρμακεία, with the capacity of losing one’s reason.

The first valence was previously discussed with Jezebel’s activity involving deception – πλανᾷ (2:20).¹⁰¹⁸ It will be transferred onto the actual judgment of Babylon in chapter 18:23 –ἐν τῇ φαρμακείᾳ σου ἐπλανήθησαν πάντα τὰ ἔθνη –all nations were deceived by your sorcery.

The second interpretation of the metaphor of intoxication adds another interpretative dimension that of violence, mostly interpreted as referring to persecutions.¹⁰¹⁹ “The preoccupation with killing many people” establishes within the Apocalypse an intratextual link with the cry of witnesses in chapter 11 and will be repeated twice. In chapter 18, the

¹⁰¹⁵ For an identical perspective cf. Preisker s.v. méthē, in: *TDNT*, 4: 546.

¹⁰¹⁶ Friberg, *Analytical Lexicon of the Greek New Testament*, s.v. μεθύσκω.

The *TDNT* (546) also notes the figurative uses of the verbs above with the Apocalypse, but ascribes the ‘wine of fornication’ the meaning of idolatry, and woman being ‘drunk’ epitomizes the ungodly world.

¹⁰¹⁷ Friberg, *Analytical Lexicon of the Greek New Testament*, s.v. μεθύω. Cf. the footnote above for the meaning ascribed by the *TDNT*.

¹⁰¹⁸ Cf. the activity of the Beast in 13:14 as follows: καὶ πλανᾷ τοὺς κατοικοῦντας ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς διὰ τὰ σημεῖα ἃ ἐδόθη αὐτῷ ποιῆσαι ἐνώπιον τοῦ θηρίου, λέγων τοῖς κατοικοῦσιν ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς ποιῆσαι εἰκόνα τῷ θηρίῳ, ὃς ἔχει τὴν πληγὴν τῆς μαχαίρης καὶ ἔζησεν – And he [viz. the beast coming out from the earth] deceives those who dwell on the earth because of the signs which it was given him to perform in the presence of the beast, telling those who dwell on the earth to make an image to the beast who had the wound of the sword and has come to life.

¹⁰¹⁹ Cf. DeSilva, *Seeing Things*, 107: “The Roman rule is the rule of violence, spilling not only the blood of the holy ones and the witnesses of Jesus (17:6), but also of ‘all those who had been slaughtered on earth’ (18:23b-24). It is a time in which those destined for slaughter by the sword and for captivity meet their destiny (13:10).” Cf. Zimmermann, *Geschlechtermetaphorik und Gottesverhältnis*, 408.

political embodiment of the Great Whore –Babylon will be held responsible for shedding the blood of prophets and of saints, and of all who had been slaughtered on earth (18:24, cf. 18:20).

Other aspects enumerated above will be presented at a later point in the current study, when the group(s) providing the matter for the Whore's intoxicating drink will be discussed.

I consider the connotative uses of the verb in v. 6a to be adequate and in concordance with various motifs expressed earlier, revolving around the devastating consequences of the Great Whore's dominance, which results in moral corruption, expressed as either fornication or inebriation. The escalation to the genocidal implications of the Whore's own drunkenness could be conceived in terms of logical deduction.

More often than not, what is retained from the metaphorical employment of intoxication is the violent dimension implied by the Great Whore's actions.

In other words, the disgraceful image of the Whore being drunk will be repeated in 18:24 (cf. 19:2).¹⁰²⁰ When reformulated as divine sentence, there it is reduced to one aspect only, namely that of violence.

Violence is a question of power, of how power can be abused. Abuse may be constitutive of the manner in which she exerts power.

Since the Great Whore is the manifestation of the usurpative attempt to imitate God, abuse is therefore expected for those who oppose her claims.

Only in an abusive way and at the expense of the oppression of God's people can the reign of the Whore and the Beast be accomplished.

In case of the Great Whore, I have presented so far different facets of power associated with her character, concluding that the Great Whore is indeed potent. All these implicit references are anticipating the textual formulation of Apocalypse 17:18, in which the Great Whore's dominance –*βασιλεία* is explicitly referred at.

To sum up the results, I have established that power flows from her posture (vv.1.3) and attire (v.4). It is therefore interesting to note that to the sexual power exerted over the kings of the earth (v.2), the political influence and dominion over other elements of creation was added, such as 'water' (v.1), 'desert' (v.3) and 'earth' (v.5). The religious power she has could be obvious from her meddling with divine representatives: saints and witnesses, whose blood she is drinking (to inebriation).

The question that needs to be formulated with this issue is whether the fact that the Great Whore holds a cup (v.4) necessarily means that she procured its content.

Although the text does not make mention of such abomination, i.e. the Whore being *actively* involved in the spilling of saints' blood, one could only infer it.

¹⁰²⁰ Ruiz, *Ezekiel in the Apocalypse*, 335. Cf. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 860.

By association with the Beast and its actions, the Great Whore partakes in the guilt of those who shed innocent blood, for blood constitutes the source of her inebriation.

From the above it is obvious that violence is not only a contributing factor, but also a solution when clashes between the antagonistic apocalyptic groups, defined both by 'good' and by 'evil' escalate.

It is because of this reason that I consider violence –at least in what is depicted in 17:1-6 – to be more rhetorical in function than literal in understanding.

I apply here the term 'rhetorical' in relation to a stylized manner of depicting God's enemies in the Apocalypse, of justifying the judicial aspect of the divine intervention in the judgment to which the Great Whore is subjected. Subsequently, her partaking in some way in the extermination of God's people is enough to be subjected to divine trial.

Violence is not an issue pertaining solely to God's enemies. It is also encompassed in God's retributive system. However, in the apocalyptic writing, God is the only one authorized to exercise violence¹⁰²¹ since this always thwarts the actions of evil, for indeed "all the violence in Revelation wrought on the side of good is wrought by God and the Lamb".¹⁰²²

Of the many forms of divine violence listed by David L. Barr in the Apocalypse, respectively "cosmological violence directed against the earth, military violence directed against the Dragon and his armies and judicial violence directed against both the leaders of the opposition and all who follow them",¹⁰²³ it seems that the scene depicted in 17 corresponds to the last category.

In the divine scheme of retribution in the Apocalypse, the Whore's atrocious and potentially violent behaviour will face divine violence double in measure, as in 18:6: ἀπόδοτε αὐτῇ ὡς καὶ αὐτὴ ἀπέδωκεν καὶ διπλώσατε τὰ διπλά κατὰ τὰ ἔργα αὐτῆς, ἐν τῷ ποτηρίῳ ᾧ ἐκέρασεν κεράσατε αὐτῇ διπλοῦν –render to her as she herself has rendered, and repay her double for her deeds; mix a double draught for her in the cup she mixed.

In terms of communal aspects, the Great Whore's crime becomes paradoxically her punishment: "she is forced to drink blood, the ultimate impurity in its synecdoche of the ultimate taboo: cannibalism."¹⁰²⁴

As per the gender-informed interest, there are two observations I would like to consider.

¹⁰²¹ J. Denny Weaver, *The Nonviolent Atonement*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001, 254, quoting arguments from Miroslav Volf, Christianity and Violence, *Boardman Lectureship in Christian Ethics*, March 6, 2002, available at <http://repository.upenn.edu/boardman/2>, (no pagination) (last accessed 12th of May 2011).

¹⁰²² Harrington, *Revelation*, 195.

¹⁰²³ David L. Barr, The Lamb Who Looks like A Dragon? Characterizing Jesus in John's Apocalypse, in: idem (ed.), *The Reality of Apocalypse: Rhetoric and Politics in the Book of Revelation*, Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2006, 205-220, 208.

¹⁰²⁴ Marshall, *Gender and Empire*, 29.

It is relevant to mention that this image in one aspect confirms, in another contradicts the previous depictions of the Whore.

By virtue of the cruelty showcased previously as manifested in her sexual manipulation of kings and inhabitants of the earth, her posture, dress, and body power poses confirm the negative vein in which the Great Whore is to be conceived and correctly articulated. From this perspective, she seems to be in full control of her sexuality and feminine charms, a fully assumed character, vindictive and destructive by her very nature.

However, from the narrator's perspective, this image represents another instance of the woman's lack of self-control (σωφροσύνη)¹⁰²⁵ evident in two ways, namely her drinking human blood, which is a taboo and secondly, pursuing such transgression to inebriation.

Previously, her sexual immorality (πορνεία) manifested at a large scale, not only as a result of immoral liaisons with the kings of the earth, but also as 'the mother of whores and of earth's abominations'.

Next, if one considers the grandiosity of the Beast's roles in the Apocalypse, and analyzes them against the posture of the Whore and her attire, her being drunk represents a rupture in the image created so far: this state of mind brings about not only a display of her uncontrollable self, but also implies the loss of reason. Subsequently, the Whore's authority is sublimated, preparing the way for the Whore's rendering "ineffective and vulnerable to attack"¹⁰²⁶ as well as ridiculed.

The portrayal in this verse could have two possible consequences.

It could delineate the context in which her royal pretense, appearance and immoral acts and are adequately interpreted. These show how insane and very inadequate the idea of the Whore possessing whatever type of power actually is.

Alternatively, it could indicate that precisely her faulty nature renders her as a gate of every evil, of syncretism and moral laxity. By refusing to remain exclusive in her sexual behavior, the Great Whore displays openness towards the kings and the inhabitants of the earth, or even the Beast.

With these ideas in mind, the Great Whore's fate in 17:16, mentioned several times so far could make sense.

Maybe a corrective understanding of how violence with regard to the Great Whore of Apocalypse 17 could be needed.

Textually, there is no indication that the Whore's intoxication is a result of her deeds. Subsequently, not taken literally, but understood rhetorically, violence can be nuanced as guilt, or a co-participation in killing God's ones and as such is subjected to divine punishment.

¹⁰²⁵ Vander Stichele, Re-membering the Whore, 118, cf. Duff, *Who Rides the Beast*, 101.

¹⁰²⁶ Carson, The Harlot, the Beast and the Sex Trafficker, 224.

Having the adequate terminology for the Whore's actions minimizes, in this case, the notorious accusations of persecution.

Summary

Two coordinates of analysis, namely a generic one paired with a metaphoric coordinate constitute the focuses of the above analysis.

The first remains truthful to its referent so far by sustained references to 'whore', 'woman', as well as their corresponding conceptual domains.

The second needs to be evaluated according to the context informed by devastating consequences of violence and lack of self-control.

I started by noting some grammatical data referring to the value of the inflected verb, implying the Seer's affiliation with the oppressed, respectively, those whose blood quench the intoxicative thirst of the Great Whore. I continued with contouring the attitude of Christians. At the same time alluding at some of God's attributes, such as steadfastness the verse brings about yet another gynomorphic identification of the Great Whore.

In accordance with the previous analyses, the corporeal dimension confers unity as well as continuity to the earlier portrayals.

Introduced in relationship with the inhabitants and kings of the earth, as well as with the Beast, now her relationship expands to at least one new group, nominalized in this verse as *saints and witnesses to Jesus*. It seems they are so obvious in what they represent, that the angel will never explain these.

The relational characterization of the Great Whore reveals an antagonistic stance with the group whose blood she drinks to inebriation.

Given the fact that the Great Whore is the focus of the image of the 'drunken' woman, the formulation 'drunk with the blood of the witnesses' was analyzed both within the Apocalypse, as well as in an extended context that is most certainly informed by the apocalyptic writing.

At the level of the Apocalypse, the image continues the various expressions of the vision concerning the metaphor of intoxication. At the same time, this is new and unique when considered at the macro level of the Bible.

In the analysis above, it was shown how the metaphor of drinking is constantly reinterpreted in vv. 2 and 6. It is defocused from the inhabitants of the earth onto the Great Whore and these additional elements aid in deepening the levels of meaning.

Its figurative understanding entails references to different contexts informed by sorcery and persecution. In the latter reference, Whore's arrogant vices result in possible oppression of God's bound servants.

The Great Whore has not only inebriated the inhabitants of the earth, now she is drunk with what are possibly her own acts of violence.

The violent aspect provided by v.6 is stressed in its entirety, precisely because it adds another aspect to the Great Whore's exertion of power materialized in the sexual, political, creational, as well as cultic or religious dimension.

Conversely, this power pairs with vulnerability, according to the perspective one takes.

The gender-informed interest questioned the Great Whore's direct culpability in procuring the blood to the extent that violence was understood as rhetorical in function. A distance from the text is thus adequately imposed aiming to reduce the emotional impact of the image purported by v.6 on Christian readers.

The need for a corrective understanding of how violence is employed with the description of the Great Whore was mentioned.

With the blood

The source of the Whore's inebriation, respectively blood occurs twice with the two groups, being linked by the conjunction καί.

There were two issues discussed previously with this formulation. Besides the ambiguous construction that the text offers, which were discussed previously,¹⁰²⁷ I would like to add a further semantically related issue that needs to be evaluated.

The usage of the verb μεθύω with the preposition ἐκ followed by the genitive is rather Hebrew than Greek in formulation.¹⁰²⁸

This is another example when alimentary imagery¹⁰²⁹ is connected with death (or life) in the Apocalypse, depending on the context in which such image operates.

¹⁰²⁷ Cf. the introductory part to this verse.

¹⁰²⁸ The Greek would usually employ the proposition ἀπό. (Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 909: The LXX notes the latter usage with Deut 32:42, Isa 34:7, Jer 26:10, Psalm 35:91, Sir 1:16).

Other variants include τῷ αἵματι, and τοῦ αἵματος.

Whereas the latter variant is a correction in the classical usage of the verb, the other one represents a more radical rendition of the dative of instrument, in the Greek Hellenistic use (cf. Eph 5:18). (Smalley, *Revelation to John*, 421; Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 909).

¹⁰²⁹ Throughout the Apocalypse, alimentary references to water (22:1.7), or fruits (18:14, 22:2), are life-giving and life-sustaining, being found in abundance with the description of the New Jerusalem, in contrast with meat offered to idols (2:20), but also wine (14:8.10, 16:19, 17:2, 18:3), impurities of abominations (14:8, 17:4), as well as blood, that are detrimental to all creatures and human beings altogether. A contrastive point to what was mentioned earlier represents 19:17-18, where at the heavenly banquet, the birds of heaven are invited to eat the flesh of the various groups, previously depicted as opposing God.

Just like in Jezebel's case, in which eating εἰδωλόθυτα brought about immediate physical danger¹⁰³⁰ for the one pursuing such practice, drinking has the same disastrous consequences.

The Great Whore drinks blood as if it were wine.

It was suggested wine –οἶνος and blood –αἷμα be conjoined, possibly due to a natural association “since red wine would look like blood.”¹⁰³¹

In the following, I will present the meaning, implications and the extent of the metaphor of intoxication as presented in v. 6a, having blood as its source.

The concept of blood has been symbolic of certain powers in the Ancient World, combining ideas of “war, destruction and death, and thus crosses the lines of different concepts of sacrifice.”¹⁰³²

Further, blood is used to denote the colour red (6:12, 16:3.4). It is also an indicator of an eschatological catastrophe such as ‘hail’ and ‘fire’ (8:7), the ‘moon becoming like blood’ (6:12), affecting bodies of water (8:8.9, 11:6 and 16:3.4).¹⁰³³

In the Apocalypse, blood carries both a positive and a negative connotation, both as representing life and death. As a result, it can associate with following Christ, expressed as undergoing some sort of suffering, but it can also connote with punishment (14:20).¹⁰³⁴

The latter interpretative option includes the intratextual reference to Apocalypse 17:6, respectively 16:6: “because they shed the blood of saints and prophets, you have given them blood to drink. It is what they deserve” –ὅτι αἷμα ἁγίων καὶ προφητῶν ἐξέχεαν καὶ αἷμα αὐτοῖς [δ]έδωκας πιεῖν, ἅξιοί εἰσιν.

Because this image will be employed more than once in the Apocalypse, I am comparing it against two other occurrences, respectively, the almost similar phrasing in 18:24, on the one hand and on the other hand, Great Whore's the state of mind of the as a result of consuming blood.

First, the difference between 16:6 (the blood of the saints and the prophets) and 18:24 (the blood of prophets and saints, and of all those who have been slain on Earth) is the larger scale of Babylon's atrocious acts, which are registered at a cosmological scale.

Second, the same line of ideas accommodates the image of the Great Whore being drunk with “the blood of the saints and of the witnesses of Jesus (17:6, cf. 18:24) and that blood

¹⁰³⁰ Duff, *Wolves in Sheep's Clothing*, 74.

¹⁰³¹ Osborne, *Revelation*, 613. Cf. Räßle, *The Metaphor of the City*, 124.

¹⁰³² Räßle, *The Metaphor of the City*, 91.

¹⁰³³ Thompson, *The Book of Revelation*, 51.

¹⁰³⁴ Cf. Johannes Behm, s.v. haíma, in: *TDNT*, 1:172-177.

is exacted from her hand by judgment (19:2) and destruction (18:21-24),”¹⁰³⁵ for God avenges bloodshed.

Unlike the reference in 17:6, where blood appears to have an inebriating effect, in the other instances, those whom blood had been given to drink, are in this way punished, since “the drinking of the blood [without drunkenness] is a punishment and for the creatures of the sea is fatal”.¹⁰³⁶

The image of being ‘drunk with blood’ is unique in the Apocalypse.¹⁰³⁷ In understanding the implications of the metaphor of intoxication, some exegetes have expanded their research horizon in order to incorporate the classical background¹⁰³⁸ of the image, as well as the Hebrew¹⁰³⁹ tradition.

With regard to the latter variant, there could be two directions in the interpretation of this image. Either that “blood belongs to the divine sphere, is life given by God (Lev 7:11). In that sense, the harlot’s drunkenness suggests the violent act of taking away life given by God.”¹⁰⁴⁰ As a result, the judgment/punishment scheme applies perfectly, having as result the perpetrator’s own loss of life. The image could also be transferred onto ‘saints and witnesses’, where ‘life’ could imply ‘loss’ as consequence for whoever turns away from God.

Alternatively, such image could allude to blood as source of contamination.¹⁰⁴¹ Such an observation would situate the interpreter in the context of the moral evaluation of transgressions that operate with concepts such as ‘clean’/‘unclean’. In this framework, blood implies an impious trespassing of the boundaries between ‘sacred’ and ‘profane’.

¹⁰³⁵ Thompson, *The Book of Revelation*, 50.

¹⁰³⁶ Lupieri, *A Commentary on the Apocalypse of John*, 265.

¹⁰³⁷ One should keep in mind the distinction between the Whore’s intoxication with blood and the intoxication of those she corrupts with her wine.

¹⁰³⁸ Swete, *Commentary on Revelation*, 217; Charles, *Revelation*, 2:66, Beckwith, *The Apocalypse of John*, 694. Also Cf. Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 937; Osborne, *Revelation*, 613; Prigent, *Commentary on the Apocalypse of St. John*, 490; Smalley, *Revelation to John*, 432.

¹⁰³⁹ Duff, *Wolves in Sheep’s Clothing*, 76 (identical quote in Duff, *Who Rides the Beast?*, 92) quotes “The consumption of blood [...] is taboo in the Jewish tradition [...]. However, in this case the blood is doubly defiling because it is *human* blood.” (Author’s emphasis)

¹⁰⁴⁰ Räßle, *The Metaphor of the City*, 91. As an argument for this claim, she refers back to an article by D. J. McCarthy, *The Symbolism of Blood Sacrifice*, in: *Journal for Biblical Literature*, 88/1969, 166-176. Cf. Duff, *Who Rides the Beast?*, 76.

¹⁰⁴¹ Lupieri, *A Commentary on the Apocalypse of John*, 265. This idea is very much supported by writings pertaining to the Qumran community. For the text he quotes, refer to page 266 of the same commentary.

Ancient writers¹⁰⁴² have employed such expression. Literary *topoi* such as ‘drinking blood’, also ‘becoming drunk with blood’ feature quite frequently with them.

With these authors, the expression being ‘drunk with blood’ has brutal military undertones. It concentrates images of siege and devastation of lands and territories.

The military and political implications mentioned above could reverberate in the Apocalypse in the following manner.

Commentators, who opt for a more historical approach to this image and who adopt the perspective of the Christians identify the most probable historical target in John’s time, namely different expressions of ‘Rome’s rule’ as implied by this metaphor.

They find in this image a politically charged symbol for Rome as the oppressor of Christians¹⁰⁴³ and suggest various tensed historical moments that bring to memory the regrettable event of the Neronian massacres against the Christians.¹⁰⁴⁴

To sum up, in this manner, the image shifts semantically from an eschatological-redemptive frame in the Apocalypse to a more political dimension. Occasionally, it bears also economic aspects.

All the above observations, as well as other implications will be explored in detail below.

Implications of the metaphor

The metaphor of intoxication, both in OT and NT intertexts connotes with *distress*, which may or may not include *persecution* and/or *judgment*, sometimes the latter as a result of the former.

¹⁰⁴² Josephus, *Bellum Judaicum* 5.343-344, Philo, *Legum Allegoriae* 3.202, but also Cicero *Philippics* 2.29, Plinius the Elder, *Naturalis Historiae*, 14.22.28, or Suetonius *Tiberius*, 59.

¹⁰⁴³ Since this opinion is beyond dispute among commentators, and due to space limitation, I would suggest only a few proponents of this interpretative path: Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy*, Harry O. Maier, *Staging the Gaze: Early Christian Apocalypses and Narrative Self-Representation*, in: *Harvard Theological Review* 90/1997, 131-154, here 149-150; Elizabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza, *Babylon the Great: A Rhetorical-Political Reading of Revelation 17-18*, in: David L. Barr, *The Reality of the Apocalypse*, 243-270, 262, eadem, *The Power of the Word*, 137. Also, Rossing, *The Choice*, 86.

On the history of interpretation, see Boxall, *The Many Faces of Babylon the Great*, 51-68.

¹⁰⁴⁴ Charles, *Revelation* 2:65, Beckwith, *The Apocalypse of John*, 694, also Prigent, *Commentary on the Apocalypse of St. John*, 490, Rissi, *Die Verführung*, 56, cf. Susan Garrett, *Revelation*, in: *Women’s Bible Commentary*, 469-474, 473.

Another interpretative variant considers Domitian’s persecutions. For details, see below under the **Implications of the Metaphor**.

In the Apocalypse, tribulation –θλίψις (1:9, 2:9.10, 7:14) –as motif appears constantly together with its cognates.

It occurs because of the word and the bearing witness to God and Jesus –διὰ τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ διὰ τὴν μαρτυρίαν (6:9), usually resulting in death (11:7, 12:17, 13:7).

The groups who are presented in some sort of distress are *prophets* (οἱ προφῆται), *saints* (οἱ ἅγιοι), *witnesses* (οἱ μάρτυρες), *slaves* (οἱ δοῦλοι, cf. 1:1, 2:20, 7:3, 10:7, 11:18, 15:3, 19:2.5, 22:3.6), as well as [souls of the] *ones slaughtered* –ψυχὰς τῶν ἐσφαγμένων (6:9, 17:6, 18:24) who are required endurance –ὑπομονή –mentioned in 1:9.

Being the only of the weapon of the oppressed,¹⁰⁴⁵ endurance is defined as “a radical attitude, which excludes compromise [...] even if in some cases it leads to becoming a martyr [...] due to their (i.e. people’s) keeping God’s commission of God and witnessing him.”¹⁰⁴⁶

In the Apocalypse, endurance is connected with the dimension of time. The cry of the two witnesses of 6:10: “Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long will it be before you judge and avenge our blood on the inhabitants of the earth?” is responded in the next verse by the fact that they to wait a little longer –ἔτι χρόνον μικρόν, although in 10:6, we are informed that there will be no delay –ὅτι χρόνος οὐκέτι ἔσται. Hope is thus a key element that permeates the text of the Apocalypse, enforced through *endurance* and *perseverance* in faith.

This attitude represents not only the complete abandonment of God’s chosen to divine providence, for God’s judgments are holy and true (19:2) –ἀληθινὰ καὶ δίκαια αἱ κρίσεις αὐτοῦ. In this framework, God is acting as a δεσπότης –sovereign, in accordance with Rev 21:3-4, “he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more”.¹⁰⁴⁷

Though the Apocalypse as a whole reinforces on numerous occasions the Christian commitment to stand vertically in face of persecution, little evidence adduced by historical data actually supports the claim that the book was written as a Christian response to Domitian’s persecutions.¹⁰⁴⁸

It is for this reason that Adela Yarbro Collins coined the term “perceived crisis” that describes a feeling of alienation as a result of separation of Christians in some communities

¹⁰⁴⁵ Harrington, *Revelation*, 195.

¹⁰⁴⁶ Nicklas, *Pantokrator*, 1-7.

¹⁰⁴⁷ Cf. Nicklas, *Pantokrator*.

¹⁰⁴⁸ Kraybill, *Imperial Cult and Commerce in John’s Apocalypse*, 34-38.

from the synagogue, as well their tensed relationships with the Gentile neighbours and conflictual issues having an economic base.¹⁰⁴⁹

She is not the only one who thinks persecution could also have economic undertones.

Beale argues that “the persecution of saints took the form of ostracism from trade.”¹⁰⁵⁰

This orientation is particularly valid with the various condemnatory expressions of Babylon’s wealth.

Rev 18, which was alluded at previously with the description of the attire and bejewelment of the Great Whore (cf. 17:4) exemplifies more vividly the extent of economic prosperity to which the political expression of the Great Whore, respectively, Babylon has reached.

In another order of ideas, in the Apocalypse, persecution of God’s elect is paired with *judgment*.

As such, it connotes quite freely not only with the *unjust* suffering of the ones bearing witness to God and Jesus, but also with the *just* suffering of the persecutors, who were not freed from their sins by his blood (1:5). This is the basis according to which the just are promised entrance in the true, real and all-encompassing life with God and Christ. The Book of life is the book of the slaughtered Lamb.¹⁰⁵¹ In this way suffering receives a deeper dimension.

The role reversal, where the persecutor is being persecuted is circumscribed to the motif of the justice of retribution as Nicklas observes.¹⁰⁵²

Subsequently, one of the reasons for Babylon’s punishment, respectively because in it “was found the blood of prophets and of saints, and of all who have been slaughtered on earth” (18:24) will be paired with the fact that Babylon is about to drink the cup of the wine of God’s wrath (16:19, cf. 14:8, 18:6). Moreover, she will be subjected to a heinous death in 17:16, when she will be made desolate and naked, her flesh devoured and burnt with fire.

The interpretation of *punishment of persecutors* shows similitude with Isa 49:29:¹⁰⁵³ οἱ θλίψαντές (...) πίονται ὡς οἶνον νέον τὸ αἷμα αὐτῶν καὶ μεθυσθήσονται – “your oppressors (...) shall be drunk with their own blood as with wine” (cf. Isa 34:5-7, Jer 26:10, also Judith

¹⁰⁴⁹ Yarbro Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis*, 84-89. Cf. Thompson, *Revelation*, 55, 57.

¹⁰⁵⁰ Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 360.

¹⁰⁵¹ Nicklas, Freiheit oder Prädestination? Also, Udo Schnelle, *Theologie des Neuen Testaments* (Uni Taschenbücher), Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2014, 723.

¹⁰⁵² Cf. Nicklas, Pantokrator.

¹⁰⁵³ Contra Lupieri, *A Commentary on the Apocalypse of John*, 264: “The text specifies at the outset that this is the blood of the holy ones and [...] the blood of the witnesses; it is not, therefore, the blood of the enemies nor of Babylon herself (which makes it impossible to see this passage as a parallel to the often-quoted verses from Isa 49:26 [...] or Isa 34:7, where “the land [of the Idumeans] will be drunk on [their] blood”).”

6:4, or Ezek 39:18-19¹⁰⁵⁴). At the sacrificial feast feature gruesome examples of eating flesh and drinking blood of princes of the earth as if it were the blood of rams, of lambs, and of goats, of bulls, all of them being fatlings of Bashan.

In this context, the intoxication with blood relates to God's castigating the wicked (cf. Deut 32:42, Zach 9:15).

The role reversal occurs not only in the retributive scheme, but also in the manner in which death is perceived.

For God's chosen, death does not represent an end. The idea of resurrection expresses and contains hope.¹⁰⁵⁵

In this interpretative frame, the Whore's fate is far more radical. Not only that her death by torture will be certain, it will also be final, devoid of any prospects for the future.

Considering unjust suffering as preceding death, the logic of the book is quite simple: since Christ was the firstborn of Messianic community (12:5), for those who keep the commandments of God and hold the testimony of Jesus – τῶν τηρούντων τὰς ἐντολὰς τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ ἔχόντων τὴν μαρτυρίαν Ἰησοῦ (12:17) death is necessary. Saints conquer by emulating the Lamb, not the lion.¹⁰⁵⁶

They are called victors, or overcomers¹⁰⁵⁷ and so their death is not in vain.

A series of eternal promises counterbalances death. The promises include permission to eat from the tree of life that is in the paradise of God (2:7), the crown of life (2:10), the fact that they will not be harmed by the second death (2:11). Also, they will be given water as a gift from the spring of the water of life (21:6), hidden manna, a white stone, and a new name written on the stone (2:17), authority over the nations (2:26), white garments (3:4.5). Because saints are worthy (3:4), their name will feature in the book of life (3:5). They will be spared from the hour of trial that is coming on the whole world to test the inhabitants of the earth (3:10).

Moreover, they will be made a pillar in the temple of God, on which it will be written the name of God, and the name of the city of God, the new Jerusalem that comes down from my God out of heaven, and a new name (3:12), as well as granting them the privilege 'to sit down with God on the divine throne, as Jesus also overcame and sat down with the Father on the throne' (3:21). Especially the last formulation implies the fact that this emulation is necessary.

¹⁰⁵⁴ Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 937; Kowalski, *Die Rezeption des Propheten Ezechiel*, 183.

¹⁰⁵⁵ Yarbro Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis*, 69, 152.

¹⁰⁵⁶ Johns, *Lamb Christology*, 190.

The Lamb is often presented by association with 'slaughter', either in the form of a participial adjective (ἐσφαγμένον 5:6. 12), or as part of an acknowledged sacrifice (ἐσφάγης 5:9).

¹⁰⁵⁷ The promise is usually formulated in the singular having as referent ὁ νικῶν (2:10.11.26, 3:5.12.21, 6:2, 21:7) and probably has as model Antipas my witness, my faithful one, who was killed (2:13).

From the above, it is clear that the Great Whore contours very well as an antithetic image of any of the groups qualified above.

With this perspective in mind, the Whore's death is a far crueler fate than apparently the death of the saints and witnesses.

Whereas the latter group will rejoice in the fulfillment of God's promises, the Great Whore will experience a full measure from God's wrath in the following (cf. 17:16; 18).

Moreover, "heaven and saints and apostles and prophets" are called to rejoice over her death,¹⁰⁵⁸ also by means of signing a heavenly hymn (19:1.6.7).

The Great Whore is not only punished in a cruel manner, but her punishment may also be inferred from the metaphor of intoxication featuring in her description.

The OT background of the apocalyptic image of drunkenness displays to a certain extent similarity in terms of motifs and associations. The main similarity resides in the fact that both images are interpreted metaphorically.

The distinction however is that generally the OT applies this violent measure to the forces opposing God, the wicked.

Firstly, it was established previously that the image of drunkenness in this verse is employed figuratively, possibly inspired by Isa 51:21 "drunk but not with wine" –μεθύουσα οὐκ ἀπὸ οἴνου.

Secondly, prescriptions concerning bloodguilt or any unlawful killing feature quite a number of times in the OT. Usually such transgressions are expiated only by the blood of the perpetrators (cf. Num 35:31-34, Deut 19:11-13, 21:1-9, Ezek 33:6-9).

Thirdly, the two main associations pertaining to judgment (cf. 17:1.2) are more pregnant than the ones considering persecutions.

It was specified previously that the image above can also reverberate with a political dimension, in the forms of oracles of doom, which is the case also in the OT.

Of the oracles of doom, a relevant one is the one against Nineveh (Nah 3:7-11). In v. 11, among other measures of punishment, the following is being mentioned: καὶ σὺ μεθυσθήσῃ –"you will be become drunk".

Similarly, Lam 4:21 foretells the destruction of the Edomites, who triumphed in Jerusalem's fall employing castigatory measures such as becoming drunk, as well as associating this state of mind with barring oneself.

Just as a side note, I mentioned numerous times so far that the political dimension could also be encountered with the destruction of the Great Whore, especially in her geopolitical personification as Babylon, prominent mostly with Apocalypse 18.

¹⁰⁵⁸ Yarbro Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis*, 38.

In this political dimension, the association between a 'city' and 'blood' as emerging from 18:24 could possibly allude to the construct 'city of blood' –πόλις τῶν αἱμάτων –familiar with Ezekiel 22:2 (38:19ff.), having Jerusalem as referent.

In the messages concerning Judah and Jerusalem, a catalogue of sins is revealed with the purpose of showing the appropriateness of God's judgment: whoever is guilty of bloodshed will be punished.

In the same verse, 'defilement by idols' follows the accusation of bloodshed. Either identical pairing or variants (e.g. adultery) of these motifs will be subsequently repeated in Ezek 23:45 (cf. Ezek 16:38) inviting to various expressions of idol worshipping.¹⁰⁵⁹

Two observations emerge from the above: with political reverberations, the metaphor of inebriation with blood in the OT occurs in a gendered form, bearing explicit reference to cities as women. Also, the generic identification allows for sexual imagery of adultery to refer to idol worship.

These constitutive elements permeated by generic undertones via intertextual connections that are useful for understanding of the various tableaux of the vision in Apocalypse 17. These elements are not new for the analysis, since they featured on several occasions by now.

The gender-informed interest also highlighted various expressions of sexual imagery, discussed previously with reference to 'whore', 'fornicate' and 'fornication'. It also encompassed the implications for idol worship.

These intertextual connections open up the range of possible associations informed by categories of 'clean'/'unclean', mentioned already in this analysis by cognates of βδέλυγμα-. Such expansion represents another vast conceptual domain dominant in the Apocalypse. It includes 'persecution' and 'punishment' from the OT context, as well as the 'contamination' resulting from blood consumption.

Cleanliness corresponds with moral rigorousness and bears cultic undertones. The Great Whore is a character lacking these traits altogether.

Although the uncleanness of the Great Whore by drinking blood of saints and witnesses to Jesus is not explicitly alluded at, with this image, John may be recalling the readers "the Levitical prescriptions against drinking blood as an abomination and evoking general taboos against cannibalism (after all this is human blood)."¹⁰⁶⁰

Numerous prescriptions in the OT warn against the fact that blood is not to be consumed (Gen 9:4, Lev 3:17, 7:26, 17:1) for blood makes earth unclean (Num 35:53, Psalm 106:38 cf. Rev 19:2). Precisely the latter connotation brings the cultic perspective into the limelight.

¹⁰⁵⁹ Moyise, *The Old Testament in the Book of Revelation*, 72; Albert Vanhoye, L'Utilisation du livre d'Ézéchiél dans L'Apocalypse in: *Biblica* 43/1962, 436-476, 475. Cf. Kowalski, *Die Rezeption des Propheten Ezechiel*, 183.

¹⁰⁶⁰ DeSilva, *Seeing Things*, 207.

The explanation for such a prohibition rests on Barr's assumption that purity notions pervade within the above image of intoxication by blood.

The human body replicates the social body, and has as a result the expulsion of the one consuming blood (Lev 7:26-27) from the community.¹⁰⁶¹

In addition to that, the association between moral laxity materialized in sexual promiscuity and drunkenness is not at all new here (cf. Gal 5:19-21).

Examples in the OT prove it manifested as *indecent exposure* (Gen 9:21, Hab 2:15) or *activity* (Gen 19:31-38).¹⁰⁶²

The Apocalypse lists those who are barred the entrance into the kingdom of God – βασιλεία θεοῦ. Among them are those who practice the works of the flesh – τὰ ἔργα τῆς σαρκός. These are in actuality, the chief accusations found with the Great Whore, namely fornication – πορνεία (cf. 17:1.2.4.5), impurity – ἀκαθαρσία (cf. 17:4.5.), sorcery – φαρμακεία (cf. 18), drunkenness – μέθαι (cf. 17:6), carousing – κῶμοι (cf. 17:6).

"The strange blending of 'blood' with the effects of wine suggests that Babylon engaged in this slaughter for her own wanton amusement (getting a 'rush', as it were, out of doing injury to God's friends)."¹⁰⁶³

These are examples in which the associations with OT expand the levels of the comprehension of this metaphor in the apocalypse, while concomitantly reinscribing of certain motifs used so far.

Other implications

In the Apocalypse, the image of 'drinking blood' (17:6, 18:24) is antithetical to that of "drinking water" (7:17, 21:6, 22:1.17).

Unlike the atoning character of Jesus' sacrifice (1:5, 5:9, cf. 7:14) and its positive consequences for Christians, with the actual context, drinking blood brings death in a manner totally opposite to that of God's followers.

As a result, in the New Jerusalem "the deadly springs poisoned by blood in Rev 16:4 are replaced by life-giving springs of water."¹⁰⁶⁴

In contrast to the Beast group, fresh, pure water of life that flows through the New Jerusalem is what saints are promised.¹⁰⁶⁵ This could occur in accordance with the overall

¹⁰⁶¹ Barr, *Women in Myth and History*, 58, ft. 10.

¹⁰⁶² Sals, *Die Biographie*, 111.

¹⁰⁶³ DeSilva, *Seeing Things*, 207. Cf. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 860 for mention of the verb connoting "revelry and joy that Babylon expressed through its persecution". Similarly, Sals, *Die Biographie*, 370 notes the following: "Diejenigen, die andere töten sind (blut)berauscht, so dass sie besonders aggressiv sind."

¹⁰⁶⁴ Rossing, *The Choice*, 85.

ascetic dimension of the Apocalypse. This dimension was mentioned previously in the study with preference for white bright garments as opposed to the Whore's colourful and expensive clothes.¹⁰⁶⁶

In another line of interpretation, the metaphor is intoxication with blood brings naturally to the exegete's mind the most famous pairing of blood with wine as in 'blood of grapes' (cf. Gen 49:11, Deut 32:14, Sir 39:26, 50:15)¹⁰⁶⁷ evoking resemblances to the Eucharistic event (Mark 14:24, par.).

Subsequently, it was suggested that the Whore could parodying the Lord's Supper by means of holding her cup. The association between wine and blood would correspond to "communing with a poisoned chalice".¹⁰⁶⁸

Before analyzing the corollary of the association enunciated above, I would like to mention the fact that the act of parodying was also mentioned with the sitting posture of the Great Whore (vv. 2.3), as well tackled in the anticipatory reference to her speaking of herself as 'queen' (18:7). In the cases where it was mentioned, it was accordingly refuted.

Nevertheless, the rationale behind this particular association rests primarily on the Great Whore holding a cup in her hand. Additionally, the content of her cup, which reverberated with cultic associations (i.e. βδέλυγμα) was part of a larger alimentary metaphor, reinscribing drinking as deadly.

Even if the Lord's Supper mixes concepts enunciated above, namely drinking wine in remembrance of Jesus' blood, it gives neither the place, nor the occasion to drink as per the antibanquet of the Whore.¹⁰⁶⁹

With this Eucharistic parallel, the valence, significance and function of drinking blood alters. It follows a logic familiar in the Apocalypse also with other elements presented with the Great Whore, namely 'what is divinely ruled is no abomination for human beings'.

The function of drinking 'blood' is different in the Apocalypse. It brings death upon Christ's followers. In contrast with the Last Supper, blood connotes with eternal life.

Additionally, regarding the divine proclamation in 18:6 "the drinking of blood is a punishment by God (in a telling contrast to the significance of drinking Christ's blood in ritual remembrance of his death)."¹⁰⁷⁰

¹⁰⁶⁵ Carey, *A Man's Choice*, 155. However, he corrects the above mentioned textual references in that in the Apocalypse, it is not specified textually that the saints drink this water (cf. ft. 27 of the same study).

¹⁰⁶⁶ Carey, *A Man's Choice*, 157.

¹⁰⁶⁷ Sals, *Die Biographie*, 109.

¹⁰⁶⁸ Campbell, *Antithetic Imagery*, 100. Also cf. Adolf Pohl, *Die Offenbarung Johannes*, 2. Teil, (Wuppertaler Studienbibel), Wuppertal: R. Brockhaus, 1983, 199 „die Hure...fordert auf ihrer Weise zum Abendmahl auf“. This pairing is also familiar with Duff, *Who Rides the Beast?*, 102-107, especially, 104.

¹⁰⁶⁹ Sals, *Die Biographie*, 109.

¹⁰⁷⁰ Marshall, *Gender and Empire*, 29.

By presentation of the anti-Eucharistic imagery, the readers could be forced into making a choice for participating in the real Eucharist.¹⁰⁷¹ Such a choice is thus mutually exclusive with approving the Whore's character as emerging from this verse.

On the whole, the image discussed above is of particular importance for the current interpretation. It also incorporates notions of *authority*, as well as *gender*.

The manner in which the Great Whore challenges God is by now notorious with the vision of Apocalypse 17.

Starting with her posture, associations, arrayal and pursuing with the measurable consequences of her actions, the challenge is set at the authority level. Moreover, the Whore's authority is thus generically constructed. It incorporates a feminine dimension –a far larger and more complex variant¹⁰⁷² of Jezebel.

In a rather mythical approach, the gendered character of the Great Whore is depicting an instance when the Terrible Mother is in need for blood to be appeased, soaked with in order to be fruitful.¹⁰⁷³

Summary

The above analysis centred on the implications of the metaphor of intoxication (with blood) as another instance of alimentary image in the Apocalypse –yet not from the perspective of inebriated, but concerning the means to reach inebriation: blood is drunk like wine and is drunk in such a quantity that inebriates the one drinking it.¹⁰⁷⁴

It may very well be that the price for the power and luxury the Great Whore displays is blood.

Because this is a vast and known concept in the Antiquity, the metaphor's connotations are exceptionally rich, having both positive and negative values attached to it.

Being drunk with blood is not, however an image proper to the Apocalypse.

It is featured in the Hebrew Bible, where it conjoins images of *distress*, *persecution*, *judgment*, but reverberates also into the *cultic* area, maintaining overall the *shameful* character of the person doing it.

¹⁰⁷¹ Duff, *Who Rides the Beast?*, 105.

¹⁰⁷² 'Larger' by the extent of her actions involving kings and inhabitants of the earth, as well saints and witnesses of Christ. 'Complex' by not only including aspects of immoral behaviour, but also reverberating to the cultic, as well as political domain. All these dimensions were discussed previously, so insisting on them would be pointless.

¹⁰⁷³ Yarbrow Collins, *Feminine Symbolism in the Book of Revelation* b, 128.

¹⁰⁷⁴ Pezzoli-Olgia, *Täuschung und Klarheit*, 148.

In contemporary vernacular literature, the metaphor of drinking blood is as well commonplace. Here, it usually takes on a *political dimension*. It retains the aspect of persecution, by applying to the ruling empire during military territorial sieges. In addition, it may imply economic aspects.

All the above aspects could very well apply to the Apocalypse. They could relate with the various and detailed descriptions of the punishment of the wicked Babylon, materialized in her fall, as a result of direct or indirect persecutions. Not only she falls, but also she is causing others to lapse, respectively the inhabitants and kings of the earth.

When bearing economic undertones, it could also imply a temporary exclusion of the Christians from trade, without trial or special accusation, these are not allowed to participate in the commerce of the empire.

In a more eschatologically oriented scheme of retribution, the image alters significantly the value ascribed to death. Subsequently, although necessary to emulate Christ, death of saints is unlike the Whore's, not final, but linked to a series of divine promises. Christians' death situates *suffering because of Christ* in a new perspective.

Cleanliness was yet again an issue brought into discussion, bearing the conclusion that the Great Whore lacks any references to sanctity.

By conjoining motifs well known, these aspects unite to reinscribe the disgraceful character of the Great Whore in a vicious circle, not new to the readers. Moral laxity and sexual promiscuity together with its addictive effects are reprimanded throughout the Bible.

Other implications of this metaphor included references to drinking water as opposed to drinking blood in the Apocalypse –possibly valued as part of the ascetic character of the book as whole.

The act of Eucharistic parody ends in death instead of eternal life.

The mythical approach was also mentioned, in an attempt to link the figure of the Great Whore with that of the Terrible Mother.

[blood of] the saints and the blood of the witnesses to Jesus

The source of the disgraceful Whore's state of mind is the "blood of the saints and the blood of the witnesses to Jesus" –ἐκ τοῦ αἵματος τῶν ἁγίων, ἐκ τοῦ αἵματος τῶν μαρτύρων Ἰησοῦ (17:6), perceived in this case as victims.¹⁰⁷⁵

As mentioned in the introductory analysis of this verse, there are two options of translating the victims of the Great Whore: either as two groups or as one.

¹⁰⁷⁵ Pezzoli-Olgia, *Täuschung und Klarheit*, 153.

Also mentioned was the fact that most commentators with approaches belonging to the historical-critical method opt for one group, considering the second denomination as an extended apposition of the first, “for the saints whose blood was shed were by that very circumstance also witnesses to the Faith.”¹⁰⁷⁶

They advance an exegetical reading of the two noun phrases, i.e. “with the blood of the saints that is with the blood of those killed for their loyalty to Jesus.”¹⁰⁷⁷ Such an option considers this phrase “a gloss added during the final revision of the Revelation, [...] an allegorical interpretation of the drunkenness of the woman based on the shift of metaphors.”¹⁰⁷⁸

Attempts have been made to identify the group both within the vision dynamics, as well as within the dramatic scenario of the Apocalypse.

From what could be inferred from the context, they are positioned in an antagonistic relationship with the Great Whore. As such, they are *not* for sure either associates of the kings of the earth, nor related to the inhabitants of the earth.

Understood collectively, saints stand for a community just like kings and inhabitants.

They are however defined in terms of their belonging, irrespective if we take the subjective, or the objective reading of the genitive Ἰησοῦ.

By their very nature, they belong to Jesus, to whom they testify, in whose suffering they partake and for whom they die.

In terms of appurtenance, they can be also identified as “the rest of the woman’s seed who are described in 12:17 as those keeping the commandments of God and bearing testimony to Jesus (cf. 6:9, 11:7, 12:11, 19:10, 20:4).”¹⁰⁷⁹

For the current study, I am interested more in their function within the Apocalypse, as well as to what extent they aid in delineating the character of the Great Whore.

Rev 16:6 lists victims of persecution as ‘saints and prophets’, because of whom the inhabitants of the earth have incurred upon them the seven bowls of wrath.

In 17:6 ‘saints and witnesses’ are mentioned.

The question that arises is whether one could equate the two categories, respectively ‘prophets’ and ‘witnesses’.

The answer can be formulated if considering the textual reference in Rev 11:3, where God gives witnesses the authority to prophesy –καὶ δώσω τοῖς δυσὶν μάρτυσίν μου καὶ

¹⁰⁷⁶ Swete, *Commentary on Revelation*, 214. For an identical perspective cf. Charles, *Revelation*, 2: 66.

¹⁰⁷⁷ Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 937.

¹⁰⁷⁸ Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 938.

¹⁰⁷⁹ Tavo, *Woman, Mother and Bride*, 339, ft, 159, cf. Rissi, *Die Verführung*, 56.

προφητεύουσιν – so these two groups could be used interchangeably.¹⁰⁸⁰ As a result, by 17:6, they are not new for the readers of the Apocalypse.

To conclude with, although in Apocalypse 17:6 the Great Whore is inebriated with the blood of the saints and witnesses –implicitly guilty of bloodshed –this image may be reminiscent of 16:5-7.

The distinction between 16:5-7 and 17:6 is that the agents carrying out bloodshed are no longer the ‘dwellers on earth’ referenced in 6:10, but the Great Whore, if one considers the image in terms of the effects.

The similarity with 16:5-7 however, lies in the fact that such transgression against the people of God will not be overlooked, since the almighty God –ὁ θεὸς ὁ παντοκράτωρ, just and holy –δίκαιος [...] καὶ ὁ ὅσιος is judging them –ἐκρινας.

Similarly, God’s true and just judgments –ἀληθινὰ καὶ δίκαια αἱ κρίσεις – will be praised – ἀληθινὰ καὶ δίκαια αἱ κρίσεις αὐτοῦ by employing the same vocabulary in 19:2. This occurs with reference to judging the Great Whore –ἐκρινεν (cf. 18:20) τὴν πόρνην τὴν μεγάλην, who corrupted the earth with her fornication. God has avenged on her the blood of his servants – ἐξεδίκησεν τὸ αἷμα τῶν δούλων αὐτοῦ ἐκ χειρὸς αὐτῆς.

The textual parallel with 16:5-7 thus paves the way and creates an expectation horizon for what is to come, concerning the fate of the Great Whore as divinely ordained. Along the process, the motif of the Great Whore’s indictment, also the gravity of the Great Whore’s acts of violence will be developed. These serve to confirm the expectation horizon already contoured in 17:1.

In the following, the group is analyzed individually with the purpose to better understand how the judgment against the Great Whore is passed and to which extent it is justified.

Saints

First, the blood of the saints (οἱ ἅγιοι) is mentioned.

Holiness is fundamental with regard to the Levitical prescriptions: “You shall be holy (ἅγιοι), for I, the LORD, your God am holy” (Lev 19:2, cf. 11:44, 20:26), reverberating with Matt 5:48: “Be perfect (τέλειοι), therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect”.

It is thus important that God’s elect share in the same category (Lev 10:3, Deut 7:6).

‘Saints’ occur in the Apocalypse 25 times.

When used in the plural, they denote the redeemed community of God (5:8, 8:3.4, 11:18, 13:7.10, 14:12, 16:6, 17:6, 18:20.24, 19:8, 20:6.9, 22:11). This category belongs to the

¹⁰⁸⁰ Prigent, *Commentary on the Apocalypse of St. John*, 336, 490.

Lamb, praying at the Heavenly Court (8:3.4). Their members engage in the battle against the Beast (13:7)¹⁰⁸¹ and are victims of the Great Whore (17:6, 18:24).

The saints' profile is determined by the very fact that they consecrate themselves to the realization of the purposes of God.

The adjectival form ἅγιος, is the attribute of God (4:8, 6:10, cf. Amos 4:2, 1 Sam 6:20) of the angels around God (14.10) and of the city coming down from heaven (21:2.10, 22:19).

As such, these are characterized by faith and perseverance (13:10, 14:12), as well as by righteous acts. These supply the material for the bridal garments in (19:8).¹⁰⁸²

For their capacities, God will avenge (16:6, 18:20), as well as fully reward (11:18) them. The macarism at 20:6 will grant them, exemption from the second death, "they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with Him for a thousand years".

Considering the list of the characters rejected from the new Jerusalem, as "the cowardly, the faithless, the polluted, the murderers, the fornicators, the sorcerers, the idolaters, and all liars, their place will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death" (21:8), saints are blessed for entering Jerusalem.

Their purity or undefiled state qualifies the Saints for such a privilege.

In this respect,¹⁰⁸³ Corrington Streete conjoins the saints, as descendants of the Woman Clothed with the Sun representatives of an "ideal community"¹⁰⁸⁴ with the undefiled mentioned in 14:1-5.¹⁰⁸⁵

Such identification rests on associations between 'holiness' and 'purity' contrasted with phenomena like menstruation, sexual relations childbirth and death.¹⁰⁸⁶ The observation above makes the text of the Apocalypse especially problematic, at least from the perspective of a gender-informed approach.

¹⁰⁸¹ The OT literary correspondent of the image of intoxication as presented above is found with Dan 7:21 (cf. 7:18). The saints are antagonists to the fourth beast, who is given authority to berate them (7:25). From their waging war, the saints eventually overcome (7:22).

¹⁰⁸² This formulation completing the reference to the Bride's garments as 'fine linen, bright and pure' – βύσσινον λαμπρὸν καθαρὸν, respectively 'for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints' – τὸ γὰρ βύσσινον τὰ δικαιώματα τῶν ἁγίων ἐστίν is attributed the following meaning "The subjective genitive hints at the saints' refusal to compromise with Babylon's norms, values, and beliefs. (Resseguie, *The Revelation of John: A Narrative Commentary*, 235).

¹⁰⁸³ Campbell, *Antithetic Imagery*, 90.

¹⁰⁸⁴ Lynn Huber, *Sexually Explicit? Re-reading Revelation's 144,000 Virgins as a Response to Roman Discourses*, in: *Journal of Men, Masculinities and Spirituality*, vol. 2(1)/2008, 3-28, here 4. Available at www.jmmsweb.org (last accessed 14.08.2011).

¹⁰⁸⁵ Corrington Streete, *The Strange Woman*, 155.

¹⁰⁸⁶ David A. deSilva, *Clean and Unclean*, in: Joel B. Green, *Dictionary of Scripture and Ethics*, Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011, 145-147, 145.

As the concept of *holiness* registered an evolution and transformation within Christianity, from “a spiritual quality concerned with ethics, morality or religious faith” to “a distinctive development [...], the association of holiness with sexual abstinence”.¹⁰⁸⁷

At least on one particular occasion, saints are problematized¹⁰⁸⁸ in terms of gender, especially when considering a certain formulation in the Apocalypse that Hanna Stenström questions, respectively 14:4: ‘it is these who have not defiled themselves with women, for they are virgins’ – οὗτοί εἰσιν οἱ μετὰ γυναικῶν οὐκ ἐμολύνθησαν, παρθένοι γάρ εἰσιν.

Since with 14:4, explicit reference is made to women as potentially defiling¹⁰⁸⁹, one could question whether women are women part of the saints, given the purity language¹⁰⁹⁰ employed in the Apocalypse and if so, to what extent.

Stenström’s conclusion notes the paradox between the maleness of the undefiled and their resemblance in behaviour¹⁰⁹¹ with the Good Woman. It is for this reason that the Apocalypse is interested in formulating of Christian identity *par excellence* male. In this formulation “women are only used to think with, as a means for expressing an understanding of Self and of the Other.”¹⁰⁹²

¹⁰⁸⁷ Judith Romney Wegner, art. Leviticus, in: *Women’s Bible Commentary*, 40-48, 42.

¹⁰⁸⁸ Contra Schüssler-Fiorenza, who envisions Apocalypse’s sexual language to express a conventional use: ‘women’ refer in 14:4-5 to the idolatry of the imperial cult. (Schüssler-Fiorenza, *Vision of Just World*, 14, 88). For a different perspective cf. Yarbrow Collins’ reading of the saints as partaking in a type of social radicalism, entailing a boycott of Roman coinage, sexual abstinence and a readiness to embrace martyrdom. (Yarbrow Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis*, 124-134).

¹⁰⁸⁹ Cf. Pippin, *Apocalyptic Bodies*, 125. According to her, the text displays a misogynist vision of the world, having women, who are powerless, excluded from the kingdom of God.

¹⁰⁹⁰ Hanna Stenström, They Have Not Defiled Themselves with Women... Christian Identity According to the Book of Revelation, in: *Feminist Companion to the Apocalypse of John*, 33-54, 36. She delimits the boundaries of pure and impure in the Apocalypse, by making reference to a semantic field encompassing on one extreme (positive) adjectives such as ἅγιος, ἄμωμοι, ὅσιος, while on the other (negative) extreme, examples such as κοινός ἀκάθαρτος, μολύνω, ῥυπαρός.

¹⁰⁹¹ By this, I mean the expectation of virginity to apply to a woman, and not a man. (Cf. Huber, *Sexually Explicit*, 16).

¹⁰⁹² Stenström, *They Have Not Defiled*, 50-51. For contrast cf. Huber’s article, *Sexually Explicit*, where she explores the rhetorical function for which the Apocalypse had such formulation. Among these, she mentions the opposition to the imperial discourse that lauded and expected men to marry and bear children as part of their masculine duty (p. 15); it is not women in their biological sex that are meant, but the feminine role (that some men assumed) is that should be avoided (p.17); the formulation above is considered to encourage an envisioning of the Revelation’s audience in a faithful relationship to the Lamb (p. 18), as well as anticipating John’s vision of the community as the virginal Bride of the Lamb in Rev 19 and 21 (p. 19). Given the first-century individual circumscribed by Roman’s visions on household (pg. 21), she perceives the formulation in question concerning Revelation’s counter-cultural image of male virginity to be liberatory.

Although an intriguing question, the saints' problematizing in terms of gender actually exceeds the scope of the current study.

Nevertheless, without discussing in detail the generic aspect of the saints' identity, especially when conceived in purity terms. This point could be used to provide a further incentive to support the negative perception of women in the Apocalypse.

Subsequently, the Great Whore occurs in the vision as gendered. Much more than politicized symbol, its character is inscribed therefore to a rhetoric of demonization of women, considered by their very nature corrupt.

The problem with such claim is that although it serves the above mentioned assumption regarding the negativity in women's perception, when dealt with at a larger scale in the Apocalypse, such argument becomes *reductionist*.

It is for this reason that the saints' generic issue was raised only to show its potential implication for a gendered reading. The current academic endeavour opts for an *inclusive* reading of 'saints', while insisting on the personal demonization of the Great Whore in particular, in all her dimensions.

To conclude with, I would like to underline the fact that by virtue of semantics, saints encompass in the Apocalypse a far larger category of denominations, than the one explicitly denoted.

Nevertheless, when the generic character of the saints is considered, the implications of the above mentioned formulation could pose a problem for the modern understanding as well as for a gender-informed exegesis as shown previously. For the intents and purposes of the current study, I favour an inclusive reading of 'saints'.

Next we continue with the precise delineation of the ones, on whose blood the Great Whore becomes inebriated.

Witnesses of Jesus

The epexegetical reference in this verse lists the witnesses to Jesus (οἱ μάρτυρες Ἰησοῦ).

Etymologically, the Greek noun μάρτυς means witness, being employed in a legal context.

At the moment of the writing of the Apocalypse, the concept did not yet have the technical meaning of the actual 'martyr'.¹⁰⁹³

¹⁰⁹³ Swete, *Commentary on Revelation*, 35: "It is tempting to translate μάρτυς by martyr [...] but it may be doubted whether the word had acquired a technical sense at the end of the first century [...] in the NT, this stage had not been reached, though the course of events was leading up to it."

Μάρτυς lists a diachronic¹⁰⁹⁴ change of meaning –from witness to martyr. This does not however render the original meaning obsolete.

In the Apocalypse, the semantic field of ‘witness, witnessing, to bear testimony’ relates to the verbal communication of a message¹⁰⁹⁵, be it through Jesus, angel or human beings, often confronted with the opposition from the Beast and the inhabitants of the earth (11:9-10).

Jesus is the object of the saint’s proclamation and testimony –μαρτυρία (1:2.9, 6.9, 11:7, 12:11.17, 19:10, 20:4), who is not denied even in the hour of great tribulation (2:3, 6:9, 12:11).¹⁰⁹⁶

He represents the prototype of ‘witnesses’, whose example will be followed accurately. Jesus is referred in Rev 1:5 as ὁ μάρτυς ὁ πιστός “the faithful witness” (cf. 3:14) and by extension, Antipas is lent the divine title, being named my witness, my faithful one –ὁ μάρτυς μου ὁ πιστός μου (2:13), this affectionate title evidencing Antipas’ belonging.

Witnesses (11:3) are characterized as *faithful* and *true* (3:4) and the authority to *prophecy* (11:3.6.10) is given to them.

With the above occurrences, “death is involved, but ‘martyrdom’ in the Apocalypse clearly involves bearing witness to the truth as well as dying.”¹⁰⁹⁷

The issue of death (cf. 2:13, 6:9, 11:7-8, 12:11, 17:6, 19:10 cf. also 13:9-10, 14:4-5) is of essence here.

The Apocalypse lists various types of death¹⁰⁹⁸ of the witnesses, because of persecutory measures: either they are slaughtered (6:9, 18:24) by beheading (20:4), or their blood is shed (16.6, 18:24) and drunk (17:6).

¹⁰⁹⁴ Allison Trites, Μάρτυς and Martyrdom in the Apocalypse: A Semantic Study, in: *Novum Testamentum* 15/1973, 72-80. Cf. idem, *The New Testament Concept of Witness*, (Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series 31) Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977. The stages he lists are five (Μάρτυς and Martyrdom, 72-73): (1) a witness in a law court, death being excluded; (2) a witness in a law court who is executed for witnessing; (3) death as part of the witness, (4) the idea of ‘martyr’ focusing on death primarily but also including bearing witness; (5) martyr finally erases the idea of witness (also cf. Street, *Here Comes the Judge*, 8).

At the period of the writing of the Apocalypse, the term has not reached the final two stages, being mostly associated with bearing witness. (p. 78)

¹⁰⁹⁵ Trites, Μάρτυς and Martyrdom, 78.

¹⁰⁹⁶ Rissi, *Die Veführung*, 56.

¹⁰⁹⁷ H. Strathmann, s.v. mártys, martyréō, martyría, mártýrion inter alia, in: *TDNT* 4: 564- 570, 567.

¹⁰⁹⁸ Even if exile is not tantamount to death, it represents a means of punishment, as expressed by John in 1:9: ἐγενόμην ἐν τῇ νήσῳ τῇ καλουμένῃ Πάτμῳ διὰ τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ τὴν μαρτυρίαν Ἰησοῦ –was on the island called Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.

Whereas saints do not need further explanation in what concerns their belonging, the witnesses, whose blood intoxicate the Great Whore, are Jesus’.

Such a fact may indicate clearly that at the time of the writing of the Apocalypse, the identity of Christian was clear and included appurtenance to Jesus, on the one hand, and identification with His sacrifice, on the other hand.

Another semantic problem is whether to take Ἰησοῦ as a subjective or an objective genitive. Charles’ analysis of the μαρτυρία Ἰησοῦ in 19:10 opts for an objective reading of the genitive, i.e. a “testimony, which men bear to Jesus”¹⁰⁹⁹ considering the relevance of Rev 1:2.9, 6:9, 12:17 for such a reading.

Conversely, the subjective reading of the genitive is also equally important. The fact that they are described as belonging to Jesus means that they claim no authority for themselves but rapport themselves to Jesus.

Although I favour the subjective reading, I would consider that an objective interpretation of the genitive Ἰησοῦ should not at all be dismissed, for their witness to Jesus is the basis of their election and listing among the saints.

To conclude with, the quality of witness is an extremely important trait for the elect, even if is often paired with some sort of suffering (cf. 1:9) and even death (cf. 2:13) as a result of their holding fast to their beliefs and refusal to compromise these in any way with the temporary rulers on earth.

The witness-nature is quintessential to Christianity. It is based on Jesus himself commissioning his apostles to be his authorized witnesses as per Acts 1:8: ‘But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth’ –ἀλλὰ λήμψεσθε δύναμιν ἐπελθόντος τοῦ ἁγίου πνεύματος ἐφ’ ὑμᾶς καὶ ἔσεσθέ μου μάρτυρες ἐν τῇ Ἱερουσαλὴμ καὶ [ἐν] πάσῃ τῇ Ἰουδαίᾳ καὶ Σαμαρείᾳ καὶ ἕως ἐσχάτου τῆς γῆς (cf. Acts 1:22, 26:16.22).

¹⁰⁹⁹ Charles, *Revelation*, 2: 130. Cf. the references in the **Introduction** of this verse.

Summary

“An extreme and triumphant expression of godlessness”¹¹⁰⁰ represents the death of the followers of Jesus.

The mentioning of the saints (and witnesses) is intended to delineate again, in a dualistic manner the two great parties of the Apocalypse: the members of the true community of Lamb, opposed to the inhabitants and the kings of the earth.

The analysis above emphasized in more detail via intratextual associations the development of the Christian identity at the moment when Apocalypse was written.

After the expegetical variant was favoured, I proceeded with their closer delineation. Their relational character as people affiliated to God was given by the genitival construction that could be interpreted both in terms of their appurtenance and as having Christ as the object of their testimony.

Their function as victims was more clearly evidenced in comparison with another occurrence of them, respectively, 16:5-7.

Further, saints embody a praised state throughout the Bible and the Apocalypse is not in any way an exception from that.

In the latter book, faith and perseverance, righteous acts are rewarded by a free access to the New Jerusalem.

At least from a gender-informed perspective, textual formulations like the one in 14:1-5 carry implications not at all laudatory from a feminist stance, for, if we are to embrace the logic of the text, women could be excluded membership in the New Jerusalem.

Even if such assumption may run the risk of becoming reductionist, it fits very well the apocalypticist's rhetoric on the demonization of women, having the Great Whore as chief-example.

For lack of a stronger case and to avoid the faulty generalisations, the saints' sex was not developed further, although it was not denied that at least textually, the above mentioned formulation entails potential for a more radical gender-informed stance.

Following these, a sematic development was elaborated upon consisting in the explanatory reading of 'witnesses'.

Μάρτυς functions more as witness, rather than martyr, as the whole Apocalypse deals with witnessing (11:3) primarily to Christ (1:5, 3:14).

¹¹⁰⁰ Smalley, *Revelation to John*, 432 referring to Jürgen Roloff, *Revelation. A Continental Commentary* (transl. John E. Alsup), Atlanta: First Fortress Press Edition, 1993, 197.

The witnesses' characterization ensued from intratextual references revealed the quality of witnessing to be constitutive of the Christian identity.

In the following, the Seer's reaction is recorded: Καὶ ἐθαύμασα ἰδὼν αὐτὴν θαῦμα μέγα
John is greatly amazed –and this feeling is also recorded by the angel in v.7, which debuts the selective explanations given by the Seer to the phenomena in the vision of Rev 17:1-6a.

Amazement is listed in a series of other reactions of John: *weeping* in 5:4, as well as repeated attempts to *worship* angels 19:10, 22:8.¹¹⁰¹

Just like in now, in the beginning of the vision (17:3b), the Seer employs a verb of perception, respectively a form of the verb ὁράω.

Further, the verbs framing the vision report –ἀπὴνεγκέν, εἶδον (17:3a.b), εἶδον, ἐθαύμασα (Rev 17: 6a.b) are aorist forms of narration.¹¹⁰² Except the first verb (ἀπὴνεγκέν), all the others feature in the first person singular, thus providing identity of the narrative voice and continuity of the images described.

Within the pattern of the three part vision report, 17:6b functions as “the hinge between the vision and its interpretation”,¹¹⁰³ semantically accomplished by the angel's rapport to the Seer's amazement.

Starting with the next verse (17:7), the narrative voice will shift to the angel's, also known as *angelus interpretes*, who defocuses the explanation from the character of Whore to the identity and function of the Beast. In doing so, he will explain the Seer *selectively* the meaning of some elements pertaining to the Great Whore in the vision.

The object of John amazement is ambiguous in Greek. Since the text reads “ἰδὼν αὐτὴν”, this formulation invites to two different readings.

The personal pronoun αὐτός, αὐτή, αὐτό in its feminine form could refer back to the *woman* John sees in v.3a (τὴν γυναῖκα). Alternatively, it can very well refer to the *vision* –ὅπτασία as a whole, for in Greek this noun is also feminine.

Especially with some gender-informed postmodern biblical analyses of the text, the preference for a particular reading is very important and dependent on the lexical weight attributed to the Greek idiom denoting ‘great amazement’, respectively ἐθαύμασα (...) θαῦμα μέγα.

¹¹⁰¹ Christopher Rowland, *The Book of Revelation: Introduction, Commentary and Reflections*, in: Leander E. Keck et al. (eds.), *The New Interpreter's Bible. A Commentary in Twelve Volumes* (vol. 12), Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998, 501-743, 681.

¹¹⁰² Mathewson, *Verbal Aspects*, 151. The aorist of narration will be further used by the angel in his response to John in v. 7 (εἶπέν, ἐθαύμασας).

¹¹⁰³ Ruiz, *Ezekiel in the Apocalypse*, 339.

Nevertheless, I do not consider the 'vision' to be different from the 'woman', since the Great Whore constitutes the very object of the vision narrated by John in vv. 1-6.

If the Seer marvels at the Whore, he must have naturally done so, especially because of the latter part of the presentation. It cannot be denied that the Whore dressed and bejeweled was an apparition, meant to impress anyone who gazed upon her.

Another option enumerated above is given by the fact that the Seer could have marvelled at the grandeur of the vision. In this case, the perspective is broadened to include the other two verses, introducing the vision, respectively vv. 1-2.

Taking the two subunits together, namely vv. 1-2 and vv. 3-6 results into a consistent use of the adjective μέγας, μεγάλη, μέγα: the Whore introduced in v. 1 is great –μεγάλη, the title on her forehead reads 'Babylon the Great', Βαβυλὼν ἡ μεγάλη, and in v.6, the Seer is greatly amazed ἐθαύμασα (...) θαῦμα μέγα.

This time around, the adjective does not describe the Whore, but it refers to a state of the Seer's.

The subjects, as well as the objects of 'amazement' change in the Apocalypse as in the following. Twice in chapter 17 (vv.6,7) the Seer is depicted in this state of mind in the context of the vision concerning the Great Whore.

Additionally, in 17:8, the dwellers on earth are the subjects having now as object of marvel the fantastic mien of the Beast. In a similar context, the whole earth –ὅλη ἡ γῆ marvels the power of the Beast in 13:3.

The grammatical voice of the verb θαυμάζω also changes: the Seer notes aorist active uses, while the inhabitants and the whole earth register aorist passive (13:3), respectively future passive (17:8).

And I was greatly amazed

The verb around which the semantics of this verse is construed, respectively θαυμάζω will be analyzed both in seclusion from other grammatical elements, as well as part of an idiomatic construction.

With the latter option, θαυμάζω occurs as ἐθαύμασα [...] θαῦμα μέγα. The pleonastic formulation means literally, 'I wondered with great wonder.'¹¹⁰⁴

This particular phrasing is unique¹¹⁰⁵ in the Bible, although the grammatical formulation is quite frequent, being an example of a cognate (or internal) accusative.¹¹⁰⁶

Examples of idiomatic constructions are common in the Septuagint¹¹⁰⁷ although dative is preferred over the accusative.

In the Apocalypse, examples of such grammatical construction are also evident with 16:9 in the formulation 'human beings were scorched with fierce heat' –ἐκαυματίσθησαν οἱ ἄνθρωποι καῦμα and the exhortation in 18:6 to 'repay her double' –διπλώσατε τὰ διπλά. θαυμάζω can denote both positive and negative amazement, depending on the context.¹¹⁰⁸

Sals evaluates this occurrence as positive. She compares it with other instances in the Apocalypse, as well as argues the fact that θαῦμα is not employed in Greek in a negative sense.¹¹⁰⁹

I tend to disagree with Sals' evaluation, since in this instance, the verb θαυμάζω could allude to the fact that the Seer has 'inappropriate reaction',¹¹¹⁰ on account of two observations. First, this inappropriateness is corrected by the angel's explanation and second, as a result of this explanation (17:7-18), the initial marveling could end in deception.

The verb in question stands in a row of inappropriate reactions recorded throughout the vision: the Whore displays inappropriate sexual behaviour, her union with kings of earth is also inappropriate. Inhabitants of the earth are inappropriately presented as drunk and so is the Whore. Her attire is deemed inappropriate when compared to the simplicity of saints' attire (cf. Table 3). The Whore is also an inappropriate type of mother. As a result, it thus no wonder that the Seer's reaction may be 'out of place'.

¹¹⁰⁴ Smalley, *Revelation to John*, 432. There are other options concerning the literal translations. Aune for example, (*Revelation 17-22*, 910) has 'I was astonished with great astonishment', or Osborne, (*Revelation*, 614) 'I was awestruck with wonder'.

¹¹⁰⁵ Kowalski, *Die Rezeption des Propheten Ezechiel*, 183.

¹¹⁰⁶ Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 910, Smalley, *Revelation to John*, 432.

¹¹⁰⁷ Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 910. He lists references from Gen 12:17, Judg 16:23, 1 Kgs 17:25, Zech 1:2.14.15, Dan 11:2.

¹¹⁰⁸ θαυμάζω in: BDAG, Louw-Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, s.v. θαυμάζω, §25. 213.

¹¹⁰⁹ Sals, *Die Biographie*, 70.

¹¹¹⁰ Ruiz, *Ezekiel in the Apocalypse*, 339, 340. He notes other instances marked by inappropriateness in 19:10, 22:8.

For every inappropriate character, every time, the Apocalypse offers the reader a model to follow. The saints offer examples of appropriate sexual behavior. So does the virginal Bride of the Lamb. The Woman of chapter 12 is a mother *par excellence*. The Seer's soberness contrasts with the intoxication of the inhabitants of the earth. It highlights the wickedness of the Whore and the temporality of the kings' reign. Although the saints' white garments are simple, they are bright, unsoiled and favoured by God. The Whore's jewels cannot compare with the precious stones found with the New Jerusalem.

In the following, I will make a presentation in which the lexical weight of the verb θαυμάζω is emphasized. The meaning provided by the lexicons invariably includes translations such as 'to wonder, to be amazed, to marvel'.¹¹¹¹

I mentioned in the introduction to this verse an observation concerning the correspondence between the verb of perception ὁράω (vv.3b.6a) and the verb θαυμάζω (v.6b). The correspondence between the two verbs is a fact generally overlooked.

The example of the latter mentioned verb in the first person singular shows the amount of subjectivity and involvement of the Seer, just as εἶδον previously mentioned.

My argument behind such claim rests on the fact that the latter verb evokes several instances of emotional nature as shown in the following.

Usually, markers of emotion and perception provided by the uses of certain words and images are left out from interpretation. If mentioned though, their importance is not adequately presented.

By dealing with these markers of emotion, the divine authority of the vision would be diminished in favour of a more personal, subjective outlook. The feeling mind would be too much involved, thus awaking in the readers various reactions that can vary extensively, according to each individual's emotional background.

However, especially with apocalyptic language and imagery, pointing to such aspects can be also extremely valuable for the interpretation, for these can adduce dimensions which deepen the object of discussion, as well its implication, thus contributing to a greater apprehension of the *sensus plenior*.

The NT records human reactions of astonishment when confronted with various expressions of divine revelation, employing verbs from similar semantic field: ἐξίστημι (Matt 12:23, Mark 5:42, Luke 2:47, 24:22, Acts 2:7.12, 10:45, 12:16), ἐκπλήσσω (Matt

¹¹¹¹ Louw-Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* s.v. θαυμάζω, §25. 213. Cf. Liddell-Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, s.v. θαυμάζω, 785.

19:25, 22:33, Mark 6:2, Luke 2:48, Acts 13:12), or idioms constructed with the aid of ἑκστάσις (Luke 5:26, Acts 3:10).

With the latter variant “in the NT, ecstasy tends to focus on a state of intense astonishment to the point of being beside oneself” (Mark 5:42), put out of place, deeply distracted.

Although not necessarily determined by the context of vision, or falling into a prophetic trance (Acts 10:10, 11:15, 22:17), in the case of the apocalyptic vision discussed, ἐν πνεύματι may connote very well with the actual state of mind enunciated by the Seer in 17:3a.¹¹¹²

Reasons for such interpretative choice may be on the one hand, the confirmation of the vision experienced by the Seer in chapter 17, contributing in this way to the (semantic) unity of images. On the other hand, it may frame the vision in itself, for what follows will be no longer reported through the Seer’s eyes, but explained to him and shown by angels.

In view of the above, the verb θαυμάζω can denote *astonished perplexity* as in Mark 12:17, Luke 4:22, John 3:7. This occurs as result to a particular teaching of Jesus or apostles (Acts 2:7), or it describes the astonishment of people, in Matt 27:14, as part of a divine behavior of Jesus not responding to his accusers.

As a result, Aune aims at providing a deeper sense to his translation of 17:6b by choosing the verb ‘to be perplexed’. Considering the negative context in which it features, the verb means ‘to appall, to dumbfound’.¹¹¹³

Additionally, Aune assigns the verb θαυμάζω a judgmental value: according to him, the Seer not only “wonders”, “marvels” at what he sees, but he also tries to comprehend and adequately discern “the meaning and significance of the female figure he has seen”.¹¹¹⁴

The rationality attached to this verb is also evident with Prigent, who evaluates this verb as similar with the Johanine context, implying the *discernment of truth* behind a person or saying with a baffling appearance (John 3:7; 5:28, 1 John 3:13).¹¹¹⁵

Along with perplexity conjoined with discernment, an array of feelings is evoked.

Reactions of *fear and terror* are conjured with Mark 5:42, 16:18, Luke 5:26, Acts 3:10 (cf. the OT uses in Psalm 31:22, Jer 5:30, Ezek 26:26, 27:35, Dan 10:7).

¹¹¹² For details, cf. the analysis of 17:3a. There I elaborated more on the connection between being ἐν πνεύματι vs. being ἐν ἑκστάσει.

¹¹¹³ Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 910. Cf. Steven Thompson, *The Apocalypse and Semitic Syntax* (Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series, vol. 52), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985, 12.

¹¹¹⁴ Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 910.

¹¹¹⁵ Prigent, *Commentary on the Apocalypse of St. John*, 490. Cf. Smalley, *Revelation to John*, 433.

Surprise and curiosity are sustained by the word mystery – μυστήριον in v.5, relevant in the subunit of Apocalypse 17:3-6.¹¹¹⁶

In 17:7¹¹¹⁷ both words respectively, μυστήριον and θαυμάζω are mentioned as the angel prepares the Seer for the subsequent explanation of the vision. This occurs because John cannot judge for himself, nor can he comprehend the implications of these phenomena. A much more personal involvement of the Seer with the gendered apparition is provided by a cumulus of associative feeling ranging from *fascination*¹¹¹⁸ to *admiration*¹¹¹⁹ and *attraction*.¹¹²⁰

Verse 6 recapitulates the fascination with the gendered character as expressed by the kings and inhabitants of the earth, the Beast that associate with the Great Whore.

In the same line of ideas, Pezzoli-Olgati is convinced that the fascination John feels is grounded in the Great Whore's universal position and connects this observation with the reference in 17:15, where her mightiness manifests in the influence over λαοὶ καὶ ὄχλοι εἰσὶν καὶ ἔθνη καὶ γλῶσσαι – peoples and multitudes and nations and languages.¹¹²¹

Fascination has many faces. Another interpretation is provided by Räßple, who argues that “in her infinite desire and deception, the harlot in the Book of Revelation essentially is the person who symbolizes evil choice and fascinating temptation.”¹¹²²

However, such formulation is more focused on the communitarian effect of the Whore's hubris, since by ‘desire’ Räßple means “the epitome of human desire to surpass being as created, to become infinite like God.”¹¹²³

Beale contends that a possible interpretation of θαυμάζω in the sense of ‘adore, admire’ is prompted via 17:8 and 13:3 (cf. 13:13, 17:3.8). By establishing such intratextual connection, the angel's question in the next verse is meant at rebuking the Seer's attitude not to worship the Whore, as well as at redirecting the act of reverence onto God.¹¹²⁴

¹¹¹⁶ Swete, *Commentary on Revelation*, 215, cf. Smalley, *Revelation to John*, 433.

¹¹¹⁷ Καὶ εἶπέν μοι ὁ ἄγγελος· διὰ τί ἐθαύμασας; ἐγὼ ἐρῶ σοι τὸ μυστήριον τῆς γυναικὸς καὶ τοῦ θηρίου τοῦ βαστάζοντος αὐτήν τοῦ ἔχοντος τὰς ἑπτὰ κεφαλὰς καὶ τὰ δέκα κέρατα. –But the angel said to me, “Why are you so **amazed**? I will tell you the **mystery** of the woman, and of the beast with seven heads and ten horns that carries her.

¹¹¹⁸ Pezzoli-Olgati, *Zwischen Gericht und Heil*, 84.

¹¹¹⁹ Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 862.

¹¹²⁰ Pippin, *Death and Desire*, 57; eadem, *Eros and the End*, 193; eadem, *The Heroine and the Whore*, 67, 82, 76.

¹¹²¹ Pezzoli-Olgati, *Zwischen Gericht und Heil*, 84-85.

¹¹²² Räßple, *The Metaphor of the City*, 126.

¹¹²³ Räßple, *The Metaphor of the City*, 126.

¹¹²⁴ Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 863, cf. Ruiz, *Ezekiel in the Apocalypse*, 339.

It would be expected the Seer's location as located in the desert would tantamount to the fact that he can now clearly see, being somehow safeguarded by the Whore's seductive charms. Nevertheless, he succumbs to her.

The context created by the vv. 3-6, in which a woman was portrayed as arrayed in soft, luxurious clothes, bedecked with sparkling jewels implied that she displayed to say at least, inappropriate behaviour towards various groups such as the kings and inhabitants of the earth in a clearly manipulative, seductive manner. With the portrayal of the Great Whore, the metaphor of intoxication was continually referred to and possibly gave way to some sort of moral laxity that could have possibly potential to inspire erotic attraction that the Seer may have felt towards the Great Whore.

In a scene where "female has seductive power",¹¹²⁵ John's function changes from seer to voyeur.¹¹²⁶

With Tina Pippin, power can also be defined in gendered terms, as erotic power – something amply exemplified by the Great Whore, who is both desired and feared.¹¹²⁷

Moore presents the following stereotypical scenario with voyeurism, coded as masculine: "a boy or a man, himself unseen, feasts his fevered eyes on the spectacle of an unsuspecting woman in a state of undress –a woman who moreover meets his own personal criteria for archetypal, awe-inspiring womanhood –and he climaxes in an ecstasy of worship."¹¹²⁸

Various gender-informed commentators have discussed the implications of the male objectifying voyeuristic gaze.

Pippin interprets this amazement, by assigning this verb sexual, or erotic capital.¹¹²⁹ She stresses the manner in which desire for the Whore and the Whore as an object of death are connected.

With Pippin, John's amazement can be viewed as transitioning: "the object of desire is made the object of death."¹¹³⁰ Accordingly, the Seer must work against or repress his

¹¹²⁵ Pippin, *Eros and the End*, 193.

¹¹²⁶ To name some cf. Sals, *Die Biographie*, 70, Stephen D. Moore, *Hypermasculinity and Divinity*, in: *A Feminist Companion to the Apocalypse of John*, 180-204, mostly Pippin, *Death and Desire*, 57-68, also eadem, *Apocalyptic Bodies*, 83. Also Catherine Keller, *Apocalypse Now and Then: A Feminist Guide to the End of the World* Boston: Beacon Press, 1996, 76.

¹¹²⁷ Pippin, *The Heroine and the Whore*, 70.

¹¹²⁸ Moore, *Hypermasculinity and Divinity*, 201.

¹¹²⁹ Pippin, *Death and Desire*, 88.

¹¹³⁰ Pippin, *Eros and the End*, 193, eadem, *Death and Desire*, 57.

sexual desire¹¹³¹ to control it,¹¹³² unless he wants to partake in the fate of the Great Whore, namely her sexual murder, cannibalistic in nature that aims at destroying her sexuality and seductiveness.¹¹³³

This interpretation is not generally accepted. It is considered far-fetched and does not correspond to the Greek text itself. The verb in aorist records the reaction at that particular moment when the vision unfolds and not any type of reflection of longing that the Seer may have had in retrospective to this.

What is interesting with Pippin's interpretation is the manner in which she draws the readers into the reading process, namely by presenting them with two options, valid not only for the Seer, but transferred onto the readers who are given the choices of either death or eternal life.

Subsequently, they should not make the evil choice, succumbing to the Great Whore's charms. In this way, the readers are left with a longing for another gendered character, namely the Bride of Lamb.¹¹³⁴

Nevertheless, I would like to point out the difficulty of such a choice, embedded in the portrayal of the Whore, where the elements listed can be evaluated as ambiguous.

The ambiguity may occur because the description on the Great Whore has two parts:¹¹³⁵ already by the end of verse 4, her portrayal seriously declines, reaching its lowest point in vv.5-6. Subsequently, with the second half of v.4, explicit negative elements are introduced, such as the 'cup full with the impurities of her fornication', her title as 'mother of whores and of earth's abominations', in v.5, as well as her state of mind – 'drunk' and the source of the disgraceful inebriation – 'blood'.

And such a portrayal is very different from the 17:(2).3, describing her sitting, or dressed in luxurious attire and adorned with every kind of precious stones.

¹¹³¹ Pippin, *Eros and the End*, 195. Cf. Lupieri, *A Commentary on the Apocalypse of John*, 256.

¹¹³² Pippin, *Death and Desire*, 57.

¹¹³³ Pippin, *Eros and the End*, 199.

¹¹³⁴ Pippin, *Eros and the End*, 202. Eadem, *Death and Desire*, 86.

¹¹³⁵ I chose to split the vision of the Great Whore in these particular subunits, since I considered them referential in delineating the portrait of the Great Whore. In this attempt and for a sharper perspective on the moral decline of the Great Whore, I effaced the derogatory names ascribed right from the very introduction to this vision, having as object the judgment of the Great Whore, with whom the kings of the earth have fornicated etc. (vv. 1-2). In vv. 4-6, I hoped thus to achieve the consistency in motifs employed, as well as continuity with the former subunit.

Similarly, Yarbro Collins writes that “(...) all feminine symbols in the Revelation are ambiguous when viewed from the point of view of the desirability of mutuality between man and woman, and of flexibility in the definition of male and female roles.”¹¹³⁶

Besides the emotional triggers elicited by the verb in discussion, in the following I will delineate the intratextual as well as intertextual parallels that could possibly contribute to the adequate contextual understanding of the verb θαυμάζω, possibly confirming the gloomy horizon of expectation alluded at throughout the vision of Apocalypse 17.

In the Apocalypse, the verb in question occurs in the context of the Beast worship by the inhabitants of the Earth (13:3.13f), which provides the most obvious intratextual allusion.

While Thompson interprets 13:3 as an act of submission, in 13:8.15 the verb adduces ‘worship’ an element of ‘submission’.¹¹³⁷ The cause for such a response is because the beast is given authority – ἐξουσία over every tribe, people, language, and nation (13:7), being allowed to devastate the earth since there is no one opposing.

However, Prigent notes a difference between marveling in chapter 13 and its meaning in the current verse. The following subunit, which starts with v.7, i.e. the explanation the angel provides *will*, or at least *should* eliminate amazement,¹¹³⁸ as the Seer is summoned to look beyond mere appearances.

As a result, in 17:6b, the negative implications prompted by the intratextual connection translate into ‘misdirected wonder’.¹¹³⁹

Another difference is noted by the observation according to which John’s pleonastic phrasing here –by contrast with chapter 13 –indicates a superior state of amazement.¹¹⁴⁰

An important intertextual allusion is Hab 1:5: “Look among the people amazed with amazement” – θαυμάσατε θαυμάσια.¹¹⁴¹

¹¹³⁶ Yarbro Collins, *Feminine Symbolism in the Book of Revelation a*, 33; cf. for identical phrasing eadem, *Feminine Symbolism in the Book of Revelation b*, in: *Feminist Companion to the Apocalypse of John*, 130.

¹¹³⁷ Ruiz, *Ezekiel in the Apocalypse*, 338. cf. S. Thompson, *The Apocalypse*, 12-13.

¹¹³⁸ Prigent, *Commentary on the Apocalypse of St. John*, 490.

¹¹³⁹ Ruiz, *Ezekiel in the Apocalypse*, 339.

¹¹⁴⁰ Sals, *Die Biographie*, 70. Similarly, Aune (*Revelation 17-22*, 910) agrees that the value of intensification is conveyed through the adjective μέγα.

¹¹⁴¹ Lupieri, *A Commentary on the Apocalypse of John*, 266. Lupieri digs into the historical context of Habakkuk and subsequently remarks that, “the amazement is caused by the approach of the powerful ‘Chaldean’ military machine, which will return to the throne of Jerusalem the rightful ruler, whose place was usurped by an illegitimate sovereign supported by Egypt and/or Assyria.” (Lupieri, *A Commentary on the Apocalypse of John*, 267).

Other intertexts to 17:6b are provided by establishing thematic links with “dreams, particularly those of an oracular or revelatory nature.”¹¹⁴²

Especially if one considers the last references, it becomes clearer that the vision of Apocalypse 17 and the Great Whore for that matter cannot be taken at a face value. Their meaning need to be further deepened.

As a result, I find analyses focusing bluntly on ‘woman’s issues’, e.g. sexuality neither to be consistent with the intertextual allusions, nor with the actual context in which any reference to ‘woman’ is perceived as a reference to a woman.

The intratextual and intertextual connections could also point to the fact that the theological message here is far more important than the images, which does not necessarily imply that the means to acquire such images do not have a strong rhetorical force.

Au contraire, the image of the Great Whore in this case is strongly shaped by gender, which as category has a strong rhetorical implication eliciting emotional response from readers. It is in this response that the potency of the image needs to be measured and explored into adequate categories concerning the nature, function and implications of such phrasing.

Summary

The valences, as well the function of the verb θαυμάζω were discussed in detail, both in isolation and in the pleonastic construction featuring in v. 6b. Both occurrences cover a large semantic spectrum having both negative and positive associations.

In this verse in particular, the verb θαυμάζω carried a negative dimension.

It was established the verb θαυμάζω triggers an emotional response, being thus anchored in the subjectivity of the Seer, very much like John being ‘in the spirit’ in v.3

¹¹⁴² Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 938.

The context is marked here by dream-visions, which are more prominent with Gen 37: 2-11 and Gen 40: 5-41:36, where Joseph plays a significant role (Smalley, *Revelation to John*, 433), as well informed by Danielic parallels, respectively Dan 4: 5-27, when Daniel is interpreting for King Nebuchadnezzar (Smalley, *Revelation to John*, 433, cf. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 861, 862), but also Dan 7:15, (cf. Dan 8:15) (Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 938), in which Daniel himself looks for interpretation of the vision exposed in 7:1-14.

Analyzed in the NT context, the subjective response concretizes in a series of emotions ranging from astonished perplexity to reactions of fear and terror, surprise and curiosity, some of them identifying with the vision in the Apocalypse 17.

The associative feelings awakened by the gendered apparition in the vision mentioned above contain fascination, admiration and attraction.

While fascination is more general in meaning and the feeling of admiration operates in a religious context, attraction is very specific in meaning.

It encompasses references to erotic power, but it also involves the readers into the act of choosing between life and death as a result of resisting or succumbing the charms of the Great Whore, a decision sometimes hard to make due to textual ambiguity.

The intratextual comparison situated the verb θαυμάζω in the context of Beast worship especially mentioned in chapter 13. Here images of power, resulted in submission and worship, as well as pointed to a type of misdirected wonder. This interpretation could offer a possible path applicable also in this verse.

The intertextual references connoted with a context informed by dream and visions. In turn, all these proved the fact that the vision and its protagonist need to be understood figuratively.

The latter formulation prompted the need to look beyond the surface images in the vision of the Great Whore and explore 'gender' as possessing rhetorical force, by being used 'to think with'.

Upon seeing her/this

Additionally, the variety of associations encountered with the verb θαυμάζω is also found with the nature and object of John's amazement.

Structural, literary and emotional rationales are distinguished, some of which have been analyzed earlier with this verse, or have been partially alluded at.

It was previously discussed the value of θαυμάζω as a *framing mechanism* in conjunction with the verb ὀράω. The vision of Apocalypse 17 operates within these two verbs, employed in similar tense and grammatical person.

The most common assumption is that amazement occurs as a *literary artifice* to introduce the explanation of the angel.¹¹⁴³

¹¹⁴³ Louis Lafont, *L'Apocalypse de Saint Jean: Texte intégral, annotations et références bibliques*, Paris: Librairie Téqui, 1975, 305.

Cases of descriptions or *ekphraseis* invite to hidden, allegorical interpretations. “The expression of confusion is juxtaposed with the introduction of the learned interpreter, a stock figure usually found conveniently at the narrator’s elbow,”¹¹⁴⁴ although throughout the Apocalypse, the Seer never asks for any explanation. The meaning of visions is either volunteered by a supernatural revealer (cf. 1:20, 7:13-14), or unfolded by the writer himself as in 4:5, 11:4, 20:14.¹¹⁴⁵

As a result, such a state of amazement could be considered a literary artifice prompting the need for further explanation as well as the soliciting the intervention of *angelus interpretes*. Other *emotional reasons* have a purely interpretative value, being dependent on the text (and context) to various degrees.

Such an example is provided by the discrepancy between what the Seer was promised and what he actually saw. “The Seer has lost his clue; he was bewildered by a vision so widely different from which he looked”¹¹⁴⁶ prompting the need for an interpreter. “The woman seems to be relishing her drunkenness much to the amazement of John, who had perhaps been expecting to witness her punishment and suffering.”¹¹⁴⁷

The Seer could have marveled the Whore’s cruelty and repugnant vulgarity.¹¹⁴⁸

The fact that her cruelty evident from the possible association in the killing of the saints, transformed her into a “fearsome”¹¹⁴⁹ character, amazement could definitely imply fear, and John could fully share in this feeling.

The Whore is certainly a sexualized figure and her fornication is highlighted. For this reason, I also mentioned her as the object of John’s sexual desire. Repression of one’s desire is encouraged in favour of the spiritual qualities of the Bride.

Although such interpretation is possible, not only is it textually very weakly supported, but it is also reductionist. It overstates the corporeal dimension in the metaphor of the Great Whore in detriment to the other two.

When discussed thematically, this assumption may gain support from the perspective of the ascetics in the Apocalypse.

¹¹⁴⁴ Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 938.

¹¹⁴⁵ Smalley, *Revelation to John*, 433.

¹¹⁴⁶ Swete, *Commentary on Revelation*, 218.

¹¹⁴⁷ Lupieri, *A Commentary on the Apocalypse of John*, 265.

¹¹⁴⁸ Max Dauner, *Commentaire sur L’Apocalypse de Jean*, Gizean: Editions Horizons Chrétiennes, 1985, 260.

¹¹⁴⁹ Prigent, *Commentary on the Apocalypse of St. John*, 490.

Her grandiosity is also something to be amazed at. Such a figure is depicted either in a position of power, as 'seated upon waters' (explained in v. 15), or on 'a Beast' and wearing a resplendent garment. As a result, her wealth could also be a matter of amazement, this motif being developed in chapter 18.

Similarly, judging from the angel's response, focusing on the Woman's position and the Beast's identity, John's amazement may be channeled onto her power and wealth.

Summary

The nature and object of Jon's amazement included three interpretational options, respectively structural, literary and emotionally charged rationales.

An emphasis on the last category could channel five different focuses, ranging from a more general to a very specific motif. The close reading of the text notes a discrepancy between what the Seer was promised and what he saw, which could have been a cause for amazement.

Put in context, this sub-verse could be also read in parallel with the previous one highlighting the Great Whore's cruelty that possibly resulted in an attitude of fear expressed by the Seer, by means of the phrasing in discussion.

The visual aspect of the Great Whore might have ignited some erotic feelings in John, who chooses to repress them in favour of the Bride. Such assumption is weakly supported by the text.

A step further in the inclusion of the previous elements pertaining to her wealth, as well as posture might have been indeed a reason to be marveled at, just like previously the economic component in the description of the Great Whore may operate as contradictory with the ascetic theme in the Apocalypse.

Irrespective of the emotional aspect entailed by 'amazement', this is a transient feeling for the facts and actions of the Great Whore are far more important than any perspectival descriptions.

6.2 Provisional Assessment (6)

The Great Whore's shameful appearance as drunk in v. 6 closes the 'visual' part of the vision.¹¹⁵⁰

The explanatory part, largely descriptive will occupy the textual space in Rev 17:7-18.

Among the general observations, one lists the depiction of the Great Whore in 17:6 as consistent with the previous manifestations, at least in some anchor point such as her gynomorphic representation and the reinterpretation of the metaphor of intoxication alluded previously, in 17:2.4.

Moreover, her characterization was completed by the addition of another group to whom she relates, respectively the saints, who are witnesses to Jesus.

Her actions are descriptive of her morality: introduced in 17:1 as committing acts of immorality with the kings of the earth, as well as inebriating the inhabitants of the earth with the wine of her immorality, it leads the Seer and implicitly the reader to expect the Great Whore's punishment has to do with what was enunciated above. However, in 17:6 a new accusation is brought against her: the Whore has not only killed, but also became intoxicated with blood of the God sent, possibly implying taking their lives.

Also, in terms of moral categories, the portrayal of a wicked woman is now complete: the loose woman, the harlot is not only promiscuous, manipulative, possibly greedy considering the amalgamation of expensive materials and jewels, but also murderous, as she is bringing about death.

The fact that the 'woman' is conjoined with a sexually derogatory term, that of 'whore' is thus in no way morally neutral. This verse is not about an innocent prostitute scapegoated for all the evils in the Apocalypse, but responsible for getting herself intoxicated by blood: the blood of the holy ones, witnesses to Jesus.

Because of this, the image above was most often interpreted not as a silent threat, but as a definitive action of the Great Whore, marked by violence. In the first manifestation, the Great Whore is successful at gaining people's allegiance by means of her promiscuity and her φαρμακεία, whereas now she is coercing the ones opposing her by violent means.

Indeed, violence was conceived in terms of its consequences reverberating on God's elect – mostly persecution, after first resulting from the Whore's positioning in a powerful

¹¹⁵⁰ The verb ὀράω is repeated twice in the same verse.

hierarchy that would allow her such reprisals, bearing implications from political, economic, or cultic domains.

Especially with the last dimension, cleanliness was brought into discussion and was concluded that it manifested at two levels: the horrific act of desecrating a human life by taking it and the contaminating effects of consuming blood.

Because the concept of power meshed well with the persecutor character of the Great Whore in this verse, the other side of the coin, usually neglected by commentators, was presented: the vulnerability associated to drunkenness, marked by a loss of reason resulted from intoxication, the state has the potential of minimizing the Whore's defense mechanisms.

Subsequently, I have also tackled the manner in which the divine retribution applied to her. Whereas the saints are made a series of promises, including plenipotentiary membership in the heavenly city, the Great Whore will undergo the most horrific torments.

For each of the accusations presented above, she will account as the dramatic apocalyptic scenario gradually unfolds, respectively, for 17:6 in 18:24 and for 17:1-2 in 19:2.

John recapitulates in a synthetic formula in 17:6, the devastating power of the Whore against the Christians.

Since witnessing to Jesus is the chief quality shaping the Christian identity, it is generally conjoined with suffering and probably death.

As a result, death was an important issue discussed. It was concluded that the suffering of the elect is presenting a particular understanding in the Apocalypse. The death of witnesses to Jesus is not the ultimate tragedy, but an expression of resistance from within a faith perspective. It occurs as following the example of the Lamb, who "is deemed worthy precisely because he overcame [...] and he did so by dying, by being slaughtered, by redeeming people from every tribe and tongue and people and nation with his blood, and by making them a kingdom and priests (5:9-10)."¹¹⁵¹

The reaction of the Seer expressed in this verse closes the larger subunit, which started in 17:3, having as object the description of *judgment* of the Great Whore, manifested ultimately as the *description* of the Great Whore.

The subjective reaction evidenced by the verbs employed in this verse conjures an emotional response from the readers, awakening in them feelings of fascination, admiration and even attraction. However, such feelings are always interpreted against a

¹¹⁵¹Johns, *Lamb Christology*, 176.

‘sober’ background, aiming at activating contempt for the Whore, as well as persuading the audience by rhetorical means to consent to the Whore’s punishment.

Several observations were formulated, pertaining to the condemnation of the enemies of God. The enemies are portrayed as indulging in acts of violence, highly sexualized, thus in dissonance with the general ascetic exhortations in the Apocalypse, as well as rhetographically repulsive.

The Great Whore’s violent nature manifested in the persecution of the saints and witnesses to Jesus could be in actuality perceived as the fruit of the sinful relationship between the Beast and her. This occurs because the Beast itself had disastrous consequence on the inhabitants of the earth. As a result, both the Whore and the Beast’s punishment, together with that of all God’s enemies is a well-known *literary convention* with the OT.¹¹⁵²

The intratextual allusion of the verb θαυμάζω with chapter 13 is relevant for the ironical aspect of John’s writing: once marvelling is exposed, the adoration is not justified. However grand she may be, the Whore is a fraud, as it is everything surrounding her.

The sexual component of the Great Whore is conjoined with the gendered one, namely feminine one into creating a powerful image. This is animated by various expressions of ‘desire’, either in the form of hubris, bearing the print of uncontrollable political ambitions, or in a manipulative, sexual manner.

The Great Whore is not only a woman who desires, catalogued as so, due to her designation ‘whore’, but also may be interpreted as the object of desire of many, kings and inhabitants, John, the Seer, included.

Finally, I agree with Greg Carey that the Apocalypse is assigning repulsive tastes to the Beast group – that includes the Whore – among which feature “the Dragon’s desire to eat human flesh (12:4), along with drinking blood (16:6, 17:6) [...] and the unspecified abominations and impurities the Whore imbibes (17:5-6).”¹¹⁵³ The reference in 17:6 is utterly detestable and abominable especially because drunkenness is obtained at the expense of other people’s lives.

He continues, noting that “the taste and smells associated with the Whore are particularly striking, in that they range from the aromatic and delicious to the detestable.”

¹¹⁵² Ruiz, *Ezekiel in the Apocalypse*, 374.

¹¹⁵³ Carey, *A Man’s Choice*, 154.

While pertinent, the observations above need to be situated in a critical-hermeneutical situation. These imply an almost subjective involvement of the reader by means of rhetorical strategies.

The major problem is that with the emotional involvement of the reader, the danger of identification and personalization is at a very high quota.

And once personalized, the image ceases to function at a more general level of understanding. So, textual abuse can happen.

With exegetical analyses, such abuse should be critically evaluated and not encouraged. Here, the main aim is to search for the validity of arguments.

While it is true that from both divine and John's perspective, the Whore deserves her punishment, her perspective, or account is never presented in the text.

It is for this reason that the Seer's account needs to be taken as it is, namely as a subjective one.

The urge to look beyond the surface structures of the text – including the generic component, in favour of larger picture is thus imperious.

Conclusions¹¹⁵⁴

The current academic endeavour is listed as a modest contribution to the growing interdisciplinary interaction between Biblical scholarship and various other disciplines, among them gender studies. As a result, with a gender-informed stamp, the paradigms of interpretation are widened, as new methodological tools are employed.

In particular, my intention was to contribute to the study of Apocalypse, especially focusing on the vision of Apocalypse 17 in which the Great Whore is introduced.

The Great Whore occurs as a gendered (feminine) image and is imbued with feminist content, considering only in the vision of the Great Whore, the noun *γυνή* appears six times. Its existence opposes the masculine images of Christ as the Lamb, which are central in the Apocalypse.

Given the large textual portion,¹¹⁵⁵ such an occurrence is not incidental, therefore the current dissertation with its exegetical analysis highlighted the importance and implications for the existence of the Great Whore in the Apocalypse.

The feminist outlook described in the previous section is also part of the reception history of the Apocalypse, aiming to better grasp the theological message of the book, respectively, in this case, understand its 'wrapping'. Subsequently, the Great Whore as depicted in the vision of Apocalypse 17:1-6 was questioned in terms of the image's complexity, function and the particular choice of its constitutive elements.

Generally, one could mention three main attitudes a gender-informed reading of the Apocalypse.

In the first case, exegetes gloss over this text: because it has a very clear understanding, they limit feminist substance or do not seem to acknowledge its existence whatsoever.¹¹⁵⁶

Alternatively, they decide to perform an excision, resulting into a denial of the value of the text, forgetting that exegesis is not surgery.

The third option they have is to reject the text, because of pragmatic reasons. This attitude is related with some of exegetes' Biblicist perception, incompatible with standards

¹¹⁵⁴ Since the structure of this study was of the nature that it provided frequent assessments of concepts discussed throughout the exegetical analysis, the length of this final chapter is significantly diminished, simply because I wish to repeat what was already said.

Moreover, the discussions entailing problematic issues will be only mentioned, but the argumentations will not be once more reiterated. Should the reader require further assistance in the better understanding of the evaluative comments in the Conclusion, I kindly ask him/her to refer back in the study to the corresponding assessments.

¹¹⁵⁵ In this formulation, I include both chapters 17 and 18 in the Apocalypse.

¹¹⁵⁶ Subsequently, they focus on other issues, relevant for a feminist perspective, such a marginalization and oppression of a minority group, ethnicity, etc.

in contemporary society, or because “some interpret the imagery of the Revelation as supporting and condoning violence”.¹¹⁵⁷

Being deeply unsatisfied by the above options, I tried to search for a compromise. As I result, I attempted an interpretation of the Great Whore in which I chose to incorporate as much as I could the literary and socio-cultural contexts, while maintaining the gender-informed character in the analysis.

Context meant much more than the inner-textual references, being much more than a literary summation. Intertextual references with the OT and other literary ancient creations permeated constantly the textual apocalyptic formulations. Additionally, the cultural context within which gendered metaphors operated was considered.

As a result, the rich reservoirs of the Jewish, Hellenistic as well as Roman traditions were surveyed, for Apocalypse is situated at the cultural confluence of these environments, a fact evident from the intertextual connection of the text that extends beyond the literary meaning of this concept to encompass other analytical dimensions.

These references are necessary to contextualize accurately the message of the book, its imagery. Such type of contextualization is cultural as well as historical. Context was particularly important for two main reasons: to help contouring the readers’ horizon of expectation in order to unveil the androcentric component in the textual formulation of the vision of Apocalypse 17.

In addition, this step is important for a postmodern gender-informed interest, such as the current one, where readers’ responses are valued. It aids thus with the understanding of employed categories in the feminist discourse.

Without attention to the Ancient contexts, the understanding of the generic categories could be very different, precisely because for example ‘gender’ as analytical category was not present with the interpretative concerns in the history of reception of the Apocalypse, but became one, due to recent feminist research. By this, I underline the linguistic turn in the study of history that shed light on its socially constructed nature as consequence of the relativity of language.

The dissertation entails two parts: the first one encapsulated more theoretical questions, and the second, was more practical by nature, respectively, having as object the analysis of the Great Whore as depicted in the vision of Apocalypse 17.

As a result, the first part of the dissertation started by delineating some of the theoretical concepts of feminist interest with the Bible in general, followed by its contribution to the

¹¹⁵⁷ Susan E. Haylen, *Metaphor Matters: Violence and Ethics in Revelation*, in: *Catholic Bible Quarterly* 73/2011, 777-796, 777.

historical-critical method, materialized in challenging some of its fixed interpretative coordinates.

The analysis informed the readers on the advantages as well as disadvantages, or dangers of misusing feminist critique. By emphasizing the contextual nature of the feminist-critical approach, this study represented a contribution to bridging the gap between the disparity of opinions concerning interpretations employing unaltered categories of the historical method and the gender-informed ones, on the one hand. On the other hand, the dissertation aims to resolve the gulf created within the feminist exegetical paradigm itself, referring to the image of the Great Whore, respectively between socio-historical feminists and the feminist-critical ones.

Both options have altered the text in order to match their interpretative paradigm: they either overlooked generic aspects, or over-emphasized them to the point of rejecting the text. It is therefore important to note how different understandings of 'context' were employed with the delineation of the theoretical concepts at stake.

Further, the history of research with regard to the Great Whore followed, that was based on the two main textual dimensions, very important for the gender-informed scholarship in delineating the Great Whore Babylon. On the one level, it encapsulates reference to a *woman/prostitute* (Rev 17:1-6.15-17, 18:2.6-7, 19:2), on the other one the one to a *city* (Rev 16:19, 17.18, 18:2.4.8-24). Such dimensions concord with the textually mentioned punishment of the Great Whore, namely as *whore* (Rev 17:16) and *city* (Rev 18).

The History of Research covered an overview of the literature on both the presentation of the gendered characters in the Apocalypse to which the Great Whore was often subsumed, as well as an overview of the various feminist approaches with the Great Whore in particular.

With the delineation of the terms revolving around the concept of 'apocalypse', I insisted on reading the vision of the Great Whore as 'apocalypse', that is as literary genre in its own right. A possible explanation for the gender-informed favouring of the Apocalypse was formulated: feminists embraced some features pertaining to the apocalyptic genre, i.e. indeterminacy of language, mysteries, visionary character etc.

Outlining the theoretical framework of the apocalypse was very important for the contextualization of the apocalyptic vision, respectively from an inner as well as outer perspective. Subsequently, the apocalypse stands in an interdisciplinary, as well as intertextual dialogue with ancient literary and cultural phenomena.

Metaphor, in this case a gendered metaphor proved an important tool of expression by which the content of the main topic of the study, i.e. the Great Whore was discussed. The type of the theory of the metaphor chosen was particular important for the study in

question. I insisted thus on a theory that fosters the untranslatability of the metaphorical expressions, but employs the fecundity of such language.

As such, metaphor taps into the existential and experiential dimension of the readers then as well as nowadays, by shaping still our lives and existence.

The metaphorical expression contained in the description of the Great Whore had controversial substance. Sexual signifiers permeated the description of the Great Whore. The appellative 'whore' conjoins with a series of other nouns, all denoting the same semantic field: prostitution (πορνεία), committing fornication (πορνεύω), living strenuously from the power of her luxury (ἐκ τῆς δυνάμεως τοῦ στήνους αὐτῆς ἐπλούτησαν), abomination (βδέλυγμα), as well as other examples of indecent behaviour, such as drinking both wine and blood (these are in conjunction with maddening passions, cf. 18:3).

Besides being named a 'prostitute' (πόρνη), the Great Whore is called other names, some of them are self-given – 'no widow' (χήρα οὐκ εἰμι), a 'queen' (βασίλισσα) cf. Rev 18:7.8, some are given to her – 'mother of whores' (ἡ μήτηρ τῶν πορνῶν), 'prison for any hated and unclean spirit and bird', (φυλακή παντός πνεύματος ἀκαθάρτου καὶ φυλακή παντός ὀρνέου ἀκαθάρτου καὶ μεμνημένου) or 'demon possessed' (κατοικητήριον δαιμονίων 18:2), an 'unclean woman' (18:24), 'vile' and responsible for not only those whose 'souls were bought and sold' (Rev 18:3) but also for those 'who have been slain on earth' (18:24). For the most part of Rev 18, actually starting with 17:18, she is identified with 'the great city', ἡ πόλις ἡ μεγάλη.

Additionally, this particular text (occasionally conjoining with some verses in Rev 18) is not only addressing the judgment and fate of a feminine image imbued with violence, as described in v.16 - οὗτοι μισήσουσιν τὴν πόρνην καὶ ἡρημωμένην ποιήσουσιν αὐτήν καὶ γυμνήν καὶ τὰς σάρκας αὐτῆς φάγονται καὶ αὐτήν κατακαύσουσιν ἐν πυρὶ (*these shall hate the whore, and shall make her desolate and naked, and shall eat her flesh, and burn her with fire*) –but also the joy of such a destruction, and the moral qualification of the measures as true and just –ἀληθινὰ καὶ δίκαια –*for his judgments are true and just; for he has judged the great prostitute who corrupted the earth with her immorality, and has avenged on her the blood of his servants* (Rev 19:2). The value judgment is all the more interesting because Apocalypse claims authority (Rev 1:1-2) –ἀποκάλυψις ἰησοῦ χριστοῦ, ἣν ἔδωκεν αὐτῷ ὁ θεός, δεῖξαι τοῖς δούλοις αὐτοῦ ἃ δεῖ γενέσθαι ἐν τάχει, καὶ ἐσήμανεν ἀποστείλας διὰ τοῦ ἀγγέλου αὐτοῦ τῷ δούλῳ αὐτοῦ ἰωάννῃ, ὃς ἐμαρτύρησεν τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ τὴν μαρτυρίαν ἰησοῦ χριστοῦ, ὅσα εἶδεν. (*The revelation of/from Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place. He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John/who testifies to everything he saw –that is, the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ*).

The images in the text are far from being innocent, as the text reinscribes, reinforces cultural assumptions on women in general. Moreover, this happens also vice-versa: communities shape texts by their shared cultural assumptions, in order to preserve socially accepted and universally valid status quo concerning women.

By reference to reality, the current feminist endeavour serves to unmask the ideological and the androcentric character of the Biblical text at stake. Additionally, it insists on the rhetorical force of (gendered) metaphors, their effectiveness in terms of rendering a theological message.

The controversial character of this problematizes also the communicative power of the 'written' images.

It materialized as well in antagonistic readings. On the one hand, with the conventional methods of appropriating the text, where the Great Whore became Babylon, the metaphorical complex was thus reduced to the political aspect solely.

These readings were opposed by feminist critical claims of the same complex, with a broad spectrum that invariably brought into discussion generic aspects often neglected by previous analyses. That is one side of the coin. The other problem was raised concerning how much weight should be added to the constitutive elements in the creation of the image.

I therefore opted for a reading in which I would keep generic claims, but I would employ a contextual reading, where incursions into ancient realities prompted multiple undertones mingling political, cultic, religious, as well as economic concepts.

The rich texture of the image and metaphor opened up complex central themes in the exegetical analysis. The exegetical analysis explored the metaphor's tensive character, articulated primarily by the readership, to which active involvement in the reading process is required.

The second part of the study represented, as mentioned previously, the concrete application of concepts delineated in the previous part. It had as object the treatment of the Great Whore as depicted in the vision of Apocalypse 17:1-6. For the sake of academic clarity, I chose to refer to three main stages in the vision above mentioned. The first one was the introduction to the vision comprised in vv. 1-2, the second one referred to the main body of the vision (vv. 3-6a) and the third one registered the Seer's reaction to the vision (6b).

Of these dimensions, especially the corporeal one, readers' response could turn out to be a dangerous venture. Since "Revelation is a piece of argumentative discourse, strategically

designed to both affect and effect”¹¹⁵⁸, a word of caution was formulated regarding the danger of emphasizing the corporeal aspect in detriment of the other two dimensions, as with some postmodern readers.

As a result, a critique was issued, having as main aim setting the boundaries of a feminist critical approach such as this one.

The textual image of the Great Whore is construed via description, which also provides the appropriate framework in which comparisons and contrasts with other evil (e.g. Jezebel) or good characters (e.g. the Bride of the Lamb, occasionally the Woman Clothed with the Sun) of the Revelation operate. The three dimensions in the metaphor of the Great Whore entailed sexual, corporeal, as well as political referents. These enrich the texture and deepen the character of the gendered image.

Throughout the portrayal of the Great Whore readers are offered clues, either explicitly, i.e. textual or implicitly –by means of contrasts and comparisons. However, these clues touch upon sacred areas of life, as well as Christian identity. They conjoin ideas of immoral behavior, unethical choices, to the extent they also include prescriptive truths on the Christian identity, an ideal imbued by ascetic concepts.

Often corrective readings were advanced, stemming mainly from a readers’ approach. Occasionally, their formulations were not uncritical of some feminist claims, which attempt either at scapegoating the Great Whore, or at over-victimizing her.

Further, with corrective approaches, the patriarchal dimension, materialized in the masculine perspective was amply criticized.

With the categories of feminist discourse, the vision could be criticized at the following levels: the perspective of the Great Whore is within the vision never an issue, therefore biasness of the account should be taken into consideration. Additionally, the narration displayed a comfort of the Seer and Angel with sexual derogatory signifier attached to the conceptual domain of a ‘woman’.

The Great Whore’s portrayal knows no empathy with the Christian author, nor is such a stance divinely approved, considering the *angelus interpretes*’ introductory words: “come I will show you the judgment of the Great Whore.”

Her gruesome depiction as being drunk with the blood of the witnesses and saints of Christ triggers an emotional response from the Seer as well from readers: that of awe, perplexity. The choice for the Great Whore corresponds from a reader’s perspective to the incompatibility with being a member of the “witnesses and saints of Christ”.

¹¹⁵⁸ Mark B. Stephens, *Annihilation or Renewal* (Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament, 2. Reihe, 307), Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011, 15.

A warning was also formulated regarding the overemphasizing of the emotional involvement of the reader with a reader's response, having as direct consequence the danger of identification and personalization.

It was proven that the function of gendered images, (the Great Whore included) is to highlight the message of the book. By appeal to emotional nature of metaphor, a clear message transpires: whoever follows the Whore, by indulging in the pleasure of senses will suffer punishment, respectively share in her death. To the rest, divine rewards are promised.

In terms of the approaches employed, the theoretical ones blended with the more pragmatic tasks. Narrative criticism following the linear progression of narrative, having the text as point of departure provided the material for the reflection on the means through which a work in particular achieves effects on its readers, respectively rhetorical criticism. These approaches were contextualized, presented from the perspective of the readers, as per reader-response criticism, a rather pragmatic approach, which added the feminist component to the discussion.

As such, the relationship between rhetoric and context was emphasized, with focus on the construction of gender in society, aiming at altering the definition of gender in society, as well as the nature of the context.

Appeal to the Ancient categories and traditions boost the image's effectiveness in terms of generic formulations.

These incursions into Ancient context stemmed from a shared knowledge that also operates in our own contemporary horizon.

Theological hermeneutics appropriates the Biblical text, so that one moves from the 'understanding of language' to the 'understanding *through* language', from knowledge of the text, to the knowledge that the text fosters.¹¹⁵⁹ By including the interpreter in the interpretative equation, hermeneutics has also a relative value.

My endeavour entailed reading the vision of the Great Whore from a feminist perspective informed by faith, in order to maintain an articulate interpretation that would remain open and actual to some of postmodern feminist claims, secondary to the text, however inspired from life itself.

*"Our faith in God causes us to think and to ask incisive questions. The hermeneutical process begins in faith, it moves forward by asking questions shaped not only by the biblical text but by life itself."*¹¹⁶⁰

Throughout the study, the task of the hermeneutics combined the attitude of trust (ensuing from faith) with an attitude of suspicion, a willingness to listen to what is revealed

¹¹⁵⁹ Kirkpatrick, From Biblical Text, 363.

¹¹⁶⁰ Kirkpatrick, From Biblical Text, 358.

through the symbol and a suspicion, which would protect it from being misled by its overt meaning.¹¹⁶¹

Hermeneutics of suspicion is imperative for questioning difficult textual images, such as the image of the Great Whore. It is an imperative not to accept everything at face value, because metaphorical expressions hide a potential usually neglected by interpreters. Hermeneutics of suspicion is the incentive for a more critical depth and understanding. The hermeneutics of trust is the result. It acknowledges the transformative power of metaphors and works against the familiarity of interpretations.

As a result, interpretation needs to be contextualized in the light of a hermeneutics of trust, since this understanding concerns both the world and us, resting on the assumption that dialogue brings new perspectives to understanding.

Openness to truth, stemming from *commitment to God* as well as *faith* are parameters of this understanding. Additionally, it includes respect for the text, intertexts and traditions of interpretations.

It is primarily directed at the interpreter(s), who needs to question his assumptions in the interpretative act and acknowledges his/her contextuality.

I mentioned previously that the meaning we seek to understand is one that helps us to better understand our world and ourselves. We interpret because we are open to the truths that can be gained from extracting the meaning in the texts and narratives, in which the transient and tragic aspects of our human condition are expressed.

The dialectic suspicion/trust permeates the exegetical analysis offered in this study in the following manner: *suspicion* occurs because there is no infallible interpretation, *trust* because there can be no final interpretation.¹¹⁶² The openness towards multiple interpretations is thus not only guaranteed, but also fostered.

The current dissertation questions 'traditional' interpretations that deny the Whore's corporeality. It equally criticizes postmodern interpretations that reduce the Great Whore to a 'woman'.

Asking necessary and difficult questions has as equivalent in value reading receptively.

Reading receptively and trustingly acknowledge internal tensions and work their way through them by maintaining faith, while enabling interpreters to read Biblical texts in new and challenging ways.

I end this final part of the study by making some very short comments, or further research recommendations which pertain both to the research on feminist issues, as well as to that of the Great Whore.

¹¹⁶¹ Paul Ricoeur, *Freedom and Nature: The Voluntary and the Involuntary* (trans. E. Kohak), Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1966, xxxi.

¹¹⁶² Kirkpatrick, *From Biblical Text*, 372, emphasis mine.

Regarding the last option, maybe more studies should be dedicated to how exactly should a less offensive feminist treatment of the Great Whore of the Apocalypse look like. This should be done in an open manner, remaining open for dialogue with other perspectives and never ceasing to actively participate in the reception history of the text of the Apocalypse, while remaining truthful to the Christian tradition to which any interpreter belongs.

Additionally, research of this type should be most importantly consistent. Its final goal envisions societal change reflected in changes in perception and attitudes concerning the role and status of women in society.

This type of analysis may be extended to other negative images of women, by unmasking and resisting patriarchal ideology in the Biblical texts.

Extending *constientization*, or awareness to gender-related issues is a constructive task of feminist criticism in general. By 'feminist criticism in general', I mean a type of criticism that can be extended outside Biblical scholarship, in larger projects with socio-political relevance.

Moreover, with feminist interpretations in particular, the exegetical reflections could be further heightened in an attempt to anchor them in various contemporary contexts, others than the already explored in the Biblical academic world, respectively the ones of the Third World.

I hope the hermeneutic variant I am advancing with the completion of this study will aid in questioning the textual formulations pertaining to the Great Whore, given the fact that the study follows the guidelines of feminist criticism.

With gender-informed readings, emerged in the second half of the previous century, as a result of various liberationist readings of the Bible within Churches, these acknowledged the value of one's standpoint (class, gender, ethnicity etc.) that can shape one's interpretation of the Apocalypse.

In view of the previously mentioned, I hope I managed to bring my contribution to the field of gender studies with regard to a feminist interpretation of the Great Whore as depicted in the vision of Apocalypse 17.

I doing so, a broadening of the interpretative horizon was achieved, having the gender-informed perspective as a possible alternative to Biblical interpretation.

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